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THE RANEE'S RUBY

By NINA BROWN BAKER

THE SECRET OF HALLAM HOUSE

THE CHINESE RIDDLE

THE RANEE'S RUBY



The floors had sagged away, leaving cracks that might shelter the jewel.

THE RANEE'S RUBY

BY

NINA BROWN BAKER

ILLUSTRATED BY
ERICK BERRY



BOSTON
LOTHROP, LEE AND SHEPARD COMPANY
1935

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THE RANEE'S RUBY

CHAPTER I

HOLLINGSWORTH HALL

THE rattling taxi turned in between blistered white wooden posts and wheezed its way up a sweeping semicircular drive, bordered with enormous old catalpa trees.

Hollingsworth Hall, though somewhat in want of repair, was a stately Southern home of "before-the-war" days. Its mellow red bricks were almost hidden by twining ivy. The rounded portico was supported by graceful white pillars reaching past the second-story windows. Great trees pressed close about it, and a bed of red geraniums blazed on either side of the open door.

Rosemary Lovell broke her shy silence impulsively. "Why, it's a *house*! I thought it was a school."

The girl beside her lifted her eyebrows. "Dr. Bowman told us that Hollingsworth Hall

was originally a private home, I believe.”

“Oh, yes, I’d forgotten that.” Rosemary blushed furiously.

Something about the cool, clipped accents of this Eastern girl made her feel crude and awkward. It wasn’t just the beautiful clothes, the exquisite grooming; it wasn’t even the awed whisper of the little nurse which had told her that this girl’s father was “a big New York millionaire.” Rosemary had too much sturdy independence to be impressed by mere wealth, rare as had been her contacts with it. But Valerie Porter was so poised, so self-assured, so grown-up, though she could have been no more than a few months older than Rosemary herself. They had met for the first time this morning, and already Rosemary was beginning to wish —

Valerie’s voice interrupted her thoughts. “That must be Miss Lucia Hollingsworth in the doorway. She seems quite to match the house, doesn’t she?”

Rosemary turned her eyes to the quaint little figure at the open door.

Miss Lucia Hollingsworth wore lilac silk, its full skirt sweeping from a tiny waist to

fall to the ground in stiff rustling folds. Around her slender shoulders was a fichu of finest lawn, edged with yellowed old lace and held by a big cameo brooch. Her white hair was parted in the middle and drawn primly back, but little rebellious curls had escaped to frame the small face — a lovely face still, for all its seventy years. The withered cheeks were faintly pink, and the blue eyes were young and alive.

As the taxi came to a stop she hurried toward them with light tripping steps.

“My dear girls — welcome to Hollingsworth Hall! Just put the bags down on the porch, Eli. Jefferson will take them in. Now let me see — which of you is which?”

“I am Valerie Porter, Miss Hollingsworth. Just a moment, while I pay the man.”

Rosemary had been fumbling in her purse, but Valerie paid the fare and dismissed the driver with her customary air of cool efficiency. She turned then to her hostess with a polite smile.

“It’s good of you to take me in. I expected to stay at the Sanitarium with Father, but Dr. Bowman tells me that it is absolutely

against his ridiculous rules. And there doesn't seem to be a decent hotel in the place."

"I expect you will find Dr. Bowman's rules are very wise ones, when you come to know him better," Miss Lucia answered mildly, and Rosemary gave a little inward chuckle. It was very evident that Valerie was accustomed to having her own way; it was equally evident that imperious young ladies were no novelty to Miss Lucia.

"And our hotel is really quite comfortable," the little lady went on, leading the way into the dim, lavender-scented parlor. "But of course for a young girl — I think Dr. Bowman said you were sixteen, my dear? — for a young girl unchaperoned it would be most unsuitable."

Valerie smiled rather scornfully, and opened her mouth to speak. But Miss Lucia appeared not to notice, for she turned at once to Rosemary.

"Sit here, my dear, you look tired. You had an overnight trip with your little brother, didn't you?"

"A day and night both. We live in Kansas, Miss Hollingsworth. It — it was pretty hard. Timmy's in quite a bit of pain, you see,

and he's so little. Oh, Miss Hollingsworth, do you think they can help him here? *Do you?* We've tried everything for him, Mums and I, and this is about the last hope."

Under Miss Lucia's kind eyes Rosemary had forgotten her usual reserve; forgotten, too, the presence of the stranger girl. Her own gray eyes had filled with tears; she fixed them anxiously upon the face of the little lady opposite her.

Miss Lucia took her hand and patted it softly. "You mustn't distress yourself, my dear. I've known Dr. Bowman for many years, and I've seen some miracles performed there at the Sanitarium. What did he say about your brother?"

"Oh, he was very encouraging, he really was! I had a long letter for him from our own doctor. You see, it was just last winter that Timmy had infantile paralysis, and we thought he had it very lightly. But it left his legs — it's dreadful, Miss Hollingsworth! He's only six, you know, and he was so active — he never liked to sit still — oh, I don't see how I can bear it if Timmy isn't going to be able to run again!"

"Hush, child. You aren't answering my question. What did Dr. Bowman say?"

Rosemary wiped her eyes and tried to smile. "He said everything was in Timmy's favor, and with the baths, and the massage, and everything, he'd have him on his feet again before fall. That's what he *said*. He was quite positive about it. But —"

"Then that's what he meant," Miss Lucia pronounced firmly. "Dr. Bowman doesn't hold out idle hopes, I can tell you that. So just forget all your worries, and know that your little brother is in good hands, and that he's going to be well again. Do you plan to stay here the whole summer?"

"Yes, I think so," Rosemary answered more calmly. "You see, there are just the three of us, Mums and Timmy and me. Mums couldn't come. She's the editor and publisher of a country newspaper, and it takes all her time. She can't afford to neglect it, and she knows that I'll do all I can to keep Timmy from being homesick."

"I'm sure you will." Miss Lucia gave her hand an approving little pat, and turned to Valerie. The Eastern girl had seated herself

quietly and was looking about the old-fashioned parlor, apparently quite uninterested in the conversation.

“It’s your father who is ill, my dear?”

Valerie nodded; rather indifferently, Rosemary thought. “Arthritis, and a threatened nervous breakdown. Our doctor in New York picked this place — I’m sure I don’t know why. I never even *heard* of Arkansas till I went to get our tickets! I suppose I’ll have to endure it for the entire summer.”

Miss Lucia’s quiet gaze scanned the girl’s face. “It seems a pity for you to stay here if you dislike it. Perhaps some other member of your family — ”

“There aren’t any other members. Father and I are alone,” Valerie answered shortly. “May I go to my room now? I’d like a bath before dinner.”

“Certainly.” Miss Lucia got to her feet, and touched an old-fashioned velvet bell-rope which hung beside the mantel. “Dorcas will take you both upstairs. I’ve given you adjoining rooms. I hope you will be company for each other. It’s too bad you didn’t come earlier, when school was in session — I had a

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lovely houseful of girls this year, — but of course it's vacation time now."

A middle-aged negro woman appeared in the doorway, wearing a clean print dress and a spotless white kerchief on her head.

"These are the young ladies Dr. Bowman sent us, Dorcas. Miss Rosemary has a little brother at the Springs, and Miss Valerie's father is there. Doctor thought they'd be more comfortable with us than at the hotel, and we'll try to make them feel at home. Will you show them their rooms, please?"

"Yes'm, Miss Lucia." Dorcas's voice was as soft as Miss Lucia's own; her comely brown face was both intelligent and pleasant. "Jefferson has done took the bags upstairs. Ef'n you-all will step this way, young ladies —"

Miss Lucia held out a slender white hand to each. "We have dinner at six, girls — though we call it supper, as every one does here. You'll have to get used to that! There'll be time for a little nap if you wish. And — don't look so woebegone, *please!* It's all new and strange, I know, and you're worried about your dear ones, but everything will come right, you can depend upon it. Dr.

Bowman doesn't accept patients he can't help; just remember that for your comfort."

As they ascended the stairs behind Dorcas, Rosemary stole a wondering look at Valerie. She herself was quite conscious of looking woe-begone, but surely it was a queer word to apply to the other girl? Why, she hadn't even seemed sorry when she spoke of her father's illness! She was walking now with her chin up, a slightly disdainful smile on her lips, her cool eyes taking in the old-fashioned furniture as though, Rosemary thought, she were used to something a great deal better.

"Stuck-up", Rosemary thought, was a far better word than "woebegone" to describe this new acquaintance.

Oh, well, what did it matter? The fact that they were living in the same house didn't mean that she need see much of Valerie. She noted the absurdly high heels clicking on the stairs ahead of her; caught a waft of Parisian perfume. "And if I don't see anything, it'll be too much!" Rosemary confided to herself.

CHAPTER II

VALERIE

By the time a week had passed Rosemary began to feel that she had lived at Hollingsworth Hall for months. The strain of her little brother's illness had fallen heavily upon the girl; the long days and nights of anxious worry had left her more tired than she realized. Now, with Timmy settled comfortably in expert hands, she could relax and claim the rest that she so greatly needed.

She spent her afternoons at Cavern Springs Sanitarium, reading or chatting to Timmy as he lay in his deck-chair on the wide sunny lawn. Visitors were not permitted before noon, and at Miss Lucia's suggestion Rosemary was not called for breakfast, but slept far into the morning.

The little lady had been genuinely alarmed at her young guest's thinness and pallor, and

had immediately set herself with gentle firmness to remedy it. She and Dorcas conspired to see that Rosemary ate sufficiently of the good, simple food provided, and they exulted when her first week showed a distinct gain in weight and energy.

As she had frankly hoped, Rosemary saw little of her fellow-guest. She and Valerie met at the evening meal, that was all.

Mr. Porter occupied a luxurious suite at the Sanitarium, with a private balcony secluded from the other patients. With wilful disregard of the rules observed by ordinary visitors, Valerie spent most of her time there. Timmy's nurse told Rosemary once that Valerie was not too popular with the nurses, who resented her air of treating them as servants to be ordered about. Miss Martin added that in her opinion Mr. Porter's recovery would proceed more rapidly if he were left to himself more. But of course these very wealthy patients always expected to have everything their own way.

"Wait till Dr. Bowman gets on to her, though," she added darkly. "She's always as sweet as pie to him, and he doesn't realize yet

what a nuisance she's making of herself. *He* won't put up with it, you can bet on that!"

It was a Sunday evening, the second since her arrival. Rosemary had watched the sunset from the flagged terrace at the side of the Hall, where a little group of splint-bottomed hickory rocking-chairs invited to lazy repose. She had seen Miss Lucia, a picture in lavender organdie, flutter off down the street to Vespers in the little white church. From the house behind her had come the faint clatter of dishes as Dorcas worked in the kitchen, her low rich contralto raised in the mournfully-sweet cadences of an ancient spiritual. That had ceased presently, and Dorcas and Jefferson, her husband, in their Sunday best, had set off down the garden path for the colored "meetin' house."

It was dark now, but Rosemary sat on, too comfortable to move, drowsily watching the first bright Southern stars twinkle out in the dark blue sky; drinking in the sweet scent of dew-drenched flowers from the old-fashioned garden.

Suddenly a glimmer of white caught her

eye. Some one was coming slowly up the garden path, the short-cut which led to the house from a side street. Shadows of overhanging trees obscured the face, but Rosemary, idly watching, decided that it must be one of Miss Lucia's old-lady friends. She walked slowly, her feet lagging, her head bowed, her slender shoulders bent as though by the weight of years. She came straight toward Rosemary, and the girl waited shyly for her to speak. Instead, she turned suddenly, threw herself into the nearest chair, and broke into stormy sobbing.

"Why, it's Valerie!" Rosemary exclaimed silently. "And she didn't see me. It's this dark dress, and the shadows — oh, goodness, what shall I *do*?"

She twisted uncomfortably in her chair. Valerie, the self-sufficient, haughty Valerie, was sobbing her heart out with no thought of an audience.

Instinctively Rosemary knew that Valerie would be furious at finding herself observed. Was it possible to steal into the house without making a sound? No, it wasn't. Well, what *could* she do, then? Perhaps if she just sat

very still Valerie would get up and go away pretty soon, and never know that — oh, gracious, now she'd done it! She'd made the slightest, tiniest movement of her knee, and the wretched book in her lap had slid off to drop with a resounding thud on the stone flagging.

Instantly Valerie's sobs checked; she lifted her head and looked about her like a startled wild animal. Her eyes fell upon Rosemary, and she twisted her lips to the old disdainful smile.

"Oh, it's you! Snooping and spying — I might have guessed! Well, I hope you've enjoyed yourself."

"I'm so sorry, Valerie," Rosemary faltered. "I didn't mean to spy, honestly I didn't. I was here when you came up, and I didn't realize you hadn't seen me until — until —"

"Until I broke down and made a spectacle of myself? Oh, well — I don't do it often. Hope it amused you." She was making a valiant effort to regain her usual off-hand manner, but there was a forlorn quaver in her voice, and the hands with which she touched her disordered hair were shaking.

On an impulse which she did not stop to question, Rosemary left her chair and took the one next to the other girl. Through the darkness Valerie's face was pale and tear-stained, but her head had regained its old defiant tilt, and she twitched her shoulder impatiently away from Rosemary's hand.

"Valerie — *please!* You're in deep trouble. Isn't there something I can do? Honestly, I'll do anything to help."

"Thanks." Valerie managed a contemptuous little laugh. "That's very kind of you, but I wasn't aware that I had asked for any help."

"I know. And maybe there isn't anything I *can* do. But — oh, Valerie, it hurts me to see you cry like that!" Rosemary's gentle voice quivered. "Don't you want to tell me about it? Sometimes that helps, just to talk things over with some one —"

"And be sympathized with? No, thank you. I *hate* sympathy. And I hate prying into my affairs, too."

Rosemary stiffened. She withdrew her hand, and spoke very distinctly.

"Listen, Valerie. We're not friends.

You've made it very clear that you're too rich and important to bother with me. And that's quite all right, because to be quite frank I don't think much of you, either. The last thing I want to do is to pry into your affairs. I'm sorry I was here to-night, but since I was here, I offered to help you as I would any one who was in trouble. You don't want my help, and that's all there is to it. From now on, you'll go your way and I'll go mine, and the less we have to do with each other the better pleased I'll be."

To her surprise, Valerie received her indignant little speech with a startled laugh.

"My word, you *are* frank! Why do you bother with me then, if that's the way you feel?"

"I don't bother with you, usually. But to-night — well, I told you. I'd try to help any one who was in trouble, whether I liked that person or not."

"You would? That's funny." Valerie peered curiously toward her in the dusk. "You're a queer girl, Rosemary — not a bit like the other girls I've known. I've been to half a dozen boarding schools — I couldn't

stand them, and never stayed long at any of them. But those girls were all just too sickeningly sweet to me."

"I can't imagine why," Rosemary answered candidly. "You're the last person I'd think of being sweet to."

Valerie laughed again, a little bitterly. "They had their reasons, my dear. Father has a yacht, and a suite at the Plaza, and an imported car. I go everywhere with him, and it would be just too lovely for some girl friend to be taken along for company. Oh, I could see through them, all right."

"I think that's perfectly horrid. Of you, I mean — to suspect every one who tried to be friendly of *wanting* something! And I don't believe they were like that; you just imagined it. Oh, there might have been one or two, but most girls aren't — aren't — "

"Mercenary? That's the word, isn't it? Well, that's the way it looked to me. And I never stayed long enough at any school to have my opinion changed."

"Why didn't you, Valerie? Didn't you like school?"

Valerie shrugged. "Too dull. Father was

always going somewhere; he has business interests in all the Eastern cities, and he loved to take me with him. Then we go yachting a lot — up to Newfoundland and down to Bermuda.”

“How marvelous! This is the first time I’ve ever been out of Kansas. Your home is in New York, isn’t it, Valerie?”

“As much as it is anywhere. We live at a hotel. I’ve never had what you’d call a home. Just a pair of tramps, Father says we are.”

Rosemary could find no fitting answer to this, and after a moment’s pause Valerie went on, softly, dreamily, rather as though she were talking to herself.

“We used to live away out West. My mother died there, in a little mining camp, when I was only three. Father hadn’t struck his big mine then, and we were desperately poor. My pretty little mother never had *anything*! So — well, Father has always felt that he must make up to *me* for what she missed. That’s why I’m what Miss Lucia probably calls overdressed for a young girl. Father loves to load me down with beautiful things — it’s all the happiness he has. It’s why he’s

kept me with him, in hotels, on trains; he can't bear to have me out of sight for long. He has done everything in the world to make me happy, and now — now he's ill, and I can't be with him, and they don't *do* anything over there at that old Sanitarium; they aren't even *trying* to cure him! Oh, it makes me so furious — I can't get them to *do* anything!"

"But you're wrong, Valerie, they are doing something," Rosemary remonstrated. "They can't work magic and make him well overnight; you mustn't expect that. But your father is improving already. Timmy's nurse told me only to-day that he's sleeping ever so much better."

"Honestly, Rosemary?" Valerie clutched at her arm. "Did she really tell you that? Of course, the doctor and Father's nurses talk encouragingly to me, but they'd do that anyway. They'd tell *you* the truth, though, wouldn't they? Did she really say he was getting better?"

"Really and truly. And — she said something else that I think you ought to know." Rosemary hesitated, then plunged ahead. "They say you're rather a — well, a disturbing

influence, Valerie. You fuss about your father so much, and scold and give orders — they really feel that he'd get well quicker if you didn't spend so much time there."

Rosemary held her breath, waiting for the explosion that she felt was bound to occur. But instead Valerie only nodded dejectedly, her eyes downcast.

"I know that. Dr. Bowman gave me a talking-to to-night. I thought I was helping, but it seems that I was only making him worse. I've promised to keep away except for a couple of hours in the afternoon. I guess I'm just no good to anybody."

The tears were near again, but she choked them back and sat with her hands clasped in her lap, gazing drearily into the shadows.

Rosemary squirmed uneasily. The last few minutes had brought such a flood of enlightenment that it seemed to her a totally different girl sat beside her now; some one she had never seen before. Poor Valerie, with her suspicion, her don't-care attitude masking a frightened loneliness! Motherless, dragged about from pillar to post by a doting father, constantly spoiled and loaded with luxuries — no wonder

she presented an unlovable personality to the world!

Something caught at Rosemary's throat as she thought of *her* riches which Valerie had never had. Her mother, Timmy, her home, her school friends — what would *she* be like if these had been denied her? She had criticized Valerie and disapproved of her, without even knowing —

Impulsively she put out her hand again; found the other girl's, and this time squeezed it warmly.

"Valerie, I was a pig just now. I was — what's that word of Timmy's? A meany, that's what I was. You know, when I said I didn't like you, and that I didn't want to have anything to do with you? Will you let me take it back? You've told me what you were crying about, though you didn't mean to —"

"I've told you a lot of things I didn't mean to," Valerie interrupted, smiling faintly. "I can't imagine why, either. I *never* confide in people. But you're the queerest girl, Rosemary — you aren't a bit like any girl I've ever known."

"And I'm glad of that, after what you said

about those other girls! Valerie, listen. You're worrying about your father; I've got the same worry about little Timmy. There's a long wait ahead of us, and we're here together. Don't you think it would be easier if we — well, just sort of propped each other up? I have my blue moments, too, I don't mind telling you. And it does seem to me that it would help if I had another girl to talk to. Miss Lucia's sympathetic, of course, but she's an old lady, and she can't realize how impatient I get. So — ”

“So let's bury the hatchet? Rosemary, I'd love to. I've never had a girl friend before.”

“Well, don't get the notion that I'm fishing for an invitation to go yachting!” Rosemary exclaimed, so hastily that they both laughed. “I'm so sure I'd be seasick that I hate even to think about it! I don't suppose we two will ever meet again after this summer's over,” she went on more soberly. “But while we're here, just for these few months, it seems to me we need each other.”

“I'd never thought of anybody but Father needing me,” Valerie answered slowly. “But if you feel that way about it, I'm glad. Only,

I'm afraid I don't know just how to begin."

"Oh, that's easy! You can begin by climbing down off that mountain-top where you sit and look down upon the common herd below. As one of the common herd, I can assure you that your attitude has been extremely annoying."

"Do I really do that? All right, catch me—here I come! Now that I think of it, it was always terribly chilly up there."



CHAPTER III

THE LOCKED CHAMBER

As Rosemary became more thoroughly rested, she abandoned late sleeping, and she and Valerie spent long mornings together, reading and chatting.

Miss Lucia, in her serene old wisdom, did not comment upon the sudden friendship which had grown up between these two girls, at first so antagonistic toward each other. From the beginning she had assumed that Rosemary and Valerie would find each other companionable, and she was pleased but not surprised to find her belief justified.

To the kindly looker-on, the two girls presented an interesting contrast in both looks and disposition. Rosemary was fair-haired and gray-eyed, with a flashing friendly smile and an immense fund of common sense. She had a passion for "reasoning things out", and

seldom acted without thinking. She was by nature conscientious, patient, reliable, gentle — all those extremely dull-sounding virtues were hers, but as Valerie told her consolingly, they didn't show enough to worry about. "And, anyway," Valerie added, "you have a *grand* sense of humor, and that almost makes up for your perfections!"

Valerie herself could lay claim to few perfections. Her dark eyes were so big and so heavily lashed that they looked almost theatrical in her thin, vivid face. Her hair was a dusky cloud of tight curls which could never be coaxed for long to lie in the smooth even waves she admired. She was childishly impatient, and had never learned to endure disappointment or delay. She was given to acting on impulse, making decisions without much thought, and giving way to despair if the results were not what she had hoped.

Fortunately, however, Valerie's faults, like Rosemary's virtues, were not too glaringly conspicuous. They were surface faults, the product of her lonely girlhood, and not the deep-down traits which make up the real person. It was that real person which Rosemary

was beginning to know now, and to find unexpectedly congenial.

The two girls shared many tastes in common, and enjoyed doing things together. One of the most interesting of their new pursuits was the exploration of the ancient house which was their present home.

Hollingsworth Hall was a fascinating place. At various times rooms had been added to it, so that, though from the front it presented a unified appearance, the interior was delightfully varied. Rooms on the same floor were built on different levels, with one step up or two steps down where they were least expected. There were long winding passages, too, and old cupboards and closets tucked away in odd corners.

Miss Lucia, pleased at their interest in her old home, told them that the school dated back to 1866, although the house itself was many years older. It had been the home of generations of Hollingsworths. Miss Lucia's great-aunt, impoverished by the Civil War, had turned it into a school for young ladies of quality.

The building had been remodeled according

to old-fashioned ideas of spacious comfort. There were no dormitories, although some of the huge old chambers had been arranged to accommodate as many as four girls. There were double rooms and single ones, too, large and small. The entire east wing was "school", with its ground floor occupied by one or two classrooms and the great dining hall which was also used in term-time as an assembly room for school exercises. The second floor in this wing was all classrooms, with bedrooms on the third floor.

The west wing contained Miss Lucia's living-quarters on the ground floor, with the breakfast room where meals were served for the summer household. The two floors above were given over to bedrooms. Valerie and Rosemary had two connecting rooms on the second floor of this wing. Kitchen and servants' quarters were in a one-story addition at the rear.

Rosemary was deeply interested in old furniture, and the varied furnishings of the old school were a keen delight to her. Miss Lucia's own suite of parlor, library, and bedroom was a treasure-house of priceless heir-

looms, but the students' rooms yielded even more interesting finds.

Valerie, at first inclined rather to sniff at Miss Lucia's treasures as "out-of-date", quickly came to share Rosemary's enthusiasm as she understood it better. Rosemary brought home from the public library an armful of books on antiques, and the girls spent hours trying to identify the period of some particular chair, and to guess its maker.

Miss Lucia told them that when the school was opened, the first students were required to bring their own furniture, as well as the linen and silver, which was still a requirement. Many of those early students had left their furnishings as a legacy to the school, so that there was no uniformity among the different rooms, but a charming range of individual selections. Miss Lucia gave the girls smiling permission to explore as they wished.

Gradually Rosemary and Valerie settled into a pleasant, placid routine. Every afternoon they walked together to the Sanitarium, where they separated, each to spend the permitted two hours with her own patient. Valerie had surprised Dr. Bowman by the meek-

ness with which she had accepted his ruling that she must abide by the usual visiting hours. Rosemary's cheery acceptance of hospital rules undoubtedly influenced her here, as also did the undeniable fact that her father was making definite improvement under the new system.

Quite often, instead of returning at once to Hollingsworth Hall, the girls went for an afternoon hike through the neighboring hills. Cavern Springs was a charming little Southern town, set down among the Ozarks. Within easy walking distances were pine-grown slopes not too difficult to climb; rocky cliffs with sparkling springs welling out at their feet; a swift chattering little river overhung by willows.

The hills were sparsely inhabited by scattered mountaineer families, who seemed to suffer from a scarcity of everything except tow-headed children and hound dogs. The girls found them a friendly people, and often returned from their rambles with home-woven willow baskets filled with the delicious Ozark peaches which Arkansas keeps for herself and seldom sends to the city markets.

It was a morning of beating summer rain. A perfect morning for "exploration" at home, the two girls decided; and immediately after breakfast they climbed the stairs and followed the dim winding passage that led to the school wing. Most of the bedrooms had been opened and thoroughly examined, but there were a few on the third floor which they had left till now.

The third-floor corridors in this wing were wider than the ones below, but very dark, for they depended for their daylight upon the bedrooms, which were all closed. The doors were farther apart here, for these rooms were unusually large. These had once been the choicest chambers, Miss Lucia told them, but this floor was no longer in use. The school's enrollment was not so large as it had once been, and the students, given a choice of rooms, preferred not to climb the extra flight of stairs.

The first door they opened showed a high-ceiled square apartment, disappointingly furnished in the bird's-eye maple of the late nineties. After a hasty glance around, Rosemary and Valerie passed on to the adjoining room.

This proved almost an exact duplicate of the first, and the third was very similar.

"I think we've exhausted the really good ones," Valerie remarked, when they found themselves in the corridor again. "These must be the rooms that Miss Lucia furnished herself, when the school was at the height of its prosperity."

"It's been going downhill of late, don't you think? Miss Lucia told me that at one time they had over a hundred girls here, but last year there were only thirty. It seems a shame."

"Oh, well, what can you expect? Modern girls haven't any use for the old-fashioned 'finishing school.' A little music, a little water-color painting, a lot of 'polish' — that was a girl's education when Miss Lucia was young, but it's terribly out-of-date now. You wouldn't like to go to that sort of school, would you?"

"No, I suppose not," Rosemary answered reluctantly, her mind flying to the modern high school which even her small town afforded. "I think it's sort of sweet, though — I mean

the — the — well, the *ladyhood* those schools turned out. Like Miss Lucia herself. Don't you?"

"Yes, it *is* sweet. I never imagined there *were* women like Miss Lucia, — in real life, I mean. She's more like something out of an old-fashioned poem. It's absolutely right for *hêr*, that 'ladyness', but for a modern girl, who has to live in a modern world — oh, I don't know! Maybe it would be perfectly useless, and maybe — just a little bit of it — I *don't* know! Come along, Rosemary. Let's pass up this whole corridor; those rooms are all alike. What's around the corner?"

Around the corner was an extremely short and narrow little passage, which in the dusk they had passed without a glance. There were no openings in its side walls, but it ended in a door.

"Why, it's locked!" Valerie exclaimed, her hand upon the knob.

"It can't be. None of the rooms is locked. It must have stuck."

"All right, you try, then."

The door steadfastly refused to yield to their efforts, and Rosemary was forced to con-



"Rosemary, do you think she *has* a secret?"

clude that Valerie was right. It was certainly locked.

“Oh, this is interesting!” Valerie exclaimed. “A Bluebeard chamber — who’d have thought it of Miss Lucia? Probably her seven husbands are hanging in there!”

Rosemary giggled. “By their moustaches. I just know Miss Lucia’s Prince Charming would have long sweeping ones, don’t you? And — what did they call those funny looking whiskers? Sideburns? Mutton-chops? They’d have them, too.”

“And flowered waistcoats, and bell-crowned hats — but I don’t believe she’d marry them and hang them up, on second thought. It doesn’t seem quite the ladylike thing to do, and I simply can’t conceive of Miss Lucia’s doing anything that isn’t ladylike.”

“Well, let’s go ask her. No, I don’t mean about the husbands; I mean about the key. She told us we were perfectly free to explore wherever we wanted to, and if there is a key, she’s sure to have it.”

Valerie assented, and the girls hurried out to the larger corridor leading to the staircase. Halfway down, however, Valerie hesitated.

"Rosemary," she said, without her usual assurance, "Do you think we ought to ask Miss Lucia about that room? Maybe it's something she'd rather we didn't know about."

Rosemary, too, checked her headlong progress downstairs. "Why, Valerie, what do you mean? She said we could go anywhere we wanted to."

"I know. But — she didn't offer us a key. She must know that that room is locked, and if she meant us to go in there, she'd surely have given us the key."

"I hadn't thought of that. Do you think she locked it on our account? She needn't have done that. If she'd just told us to keep out of the room, she surely knew we would."

"Oh, I don't think it's locked for us. I mean for us especially. I think she doesn't want *any one* to go in there."

"But *why*? She doesn't use the room. She told me herself that she hadn't climbed the stairs to this floor for years."

The girls had continued their journey downstairs while they talked in low, earnest tones. As they reached the landing they could see through the open door leading into the parlor.

THE LOCKED CHAMBER 39

Miss Lucia sat at the frame on which she worked her exquisite petit-point embroidery. Midnight, her great black cat, purred contentedly at her feet. Her sweet face was bent over the work of her thin white hands, and her dress of pink sprigged dimity gave her the girlish grace of an old portrait. It was a charming, placid little picture, yet it held a note which startled the two girls.

“Why, how sad she looks!” Rosemary whispered. “I never noticed that before, did you? She’s always smiling when she talks to us; of course, I never saw her when she thought she was alone. Do I just imagine it, Valerie?”

“No. It’s the first thing that struck me. She does look sad. Not worried, or distressed, either — just resigned, and patient, and oh, so sorrowful! Rosemary, do you think she *has* a secret? We were joking about it, but — why, maybe it’s *real*!”

At that moment Miss Lucia looked up and saw them. Instantly her face fell into the familiar smiling curves. “Oh, girls, come and see my moss-rose design. I want you to tell me if this silk is too pale.”

As they hurried across the flowered carpet

Valerie pinched Rosemary. "Not a word, now! I've a feeling that there isn't any joke about that locked room. Later, we'll try — oh, no, Miss Lucia, it isn't pale! That's just exactly the yellow-pink of your moss roses in the garden."



CHAPTER IV

INSIDE

FOR a few minutes the two girls hung over Miss Lucia's work, discussing the delicate design of old-fashioned flowers which she was working against a black background. Neither of them, however, was greatly skilled at acting. Their minds were full of the mysterious discovery of the locked room, and their excitement betrayed itself to Miss Lucia's wise old eyes.

They noticed that she gradually fell silent, her forehead creased with thought. They chattered on for a bit, conscious all the time that Miss Lucia was watching them thoughtfully. When a pause came in the conversation, it was their hostess who changed the subject.

"You were exploring the third floor of the schoolroom wing this morning, weren't you,

girls? Did you find anything very interesting up there?"

Rosemary looked helplessly at Valerie, and for a moment neither spoke. Then Valerie managed to say carelessly, "No, I'm afraid we didn't, Miss Lucia. The furniture was too modern for us."

"I suppose so," Miss Lucia nodded absently. She hesitated for a second, her blue eyes studying each face in turn. Then she appeared to make up her mind. She spoke very quietly, but Rosemary observed that she dropped her needle and folded her hands in her lap to stop them from shaking.

"Perhaps you didn't notice it. One of the rooms on that floor is locked — the only locked room in the house."

"Why, yes, Miss Lucia, we did notice it," Rosemary answered. "We were going to ask you about it, and then we decided it wasn't any of our business," she added frankly.

Miss Lucia smiled faintly. "That was thoughtful of you, my dears. But there is no need for secrecy. I think I should like you both to see that room, if you care about it."

Reading assent in their eager faces, she turned to Valerie.

“There is a little brass box on the what-not in the corner behind you, dear. Will you bring it to me?”

Valerie hurried to put the box in her lap. Miss Lucia opened it and took out an ordinary door key. With a little sigh she handed it to the girl.

“Run up and have a look round now, if you wish. Then — come back to me here, and I’ll tell you the story of the locked room.”

Valerie took the key, but she did not move. “Miss Lucia,” she said awkwardly, “we don’t want to pry. If — if this is something you’d rather not tell us — if you don’t want us to see the room — ”

Miss Lucia gave her a gentle push. “I do want you to see it, Valerie. The story — well, it’s far from being a secret. If you girls remain in Cavern Springs all summer you’re bound to hear it, in one form or another. I think — yes, I’m sure that it’s best for you to hear it from me, now. So run along. I’ll be waiting here when you come back.”

Half fearfully Valerie turned the key in the lock and pulled the door outward. Darkness confronted her. She stepped forward, and as hastily stepped back.

“Good heavens, Rosemary! Something touched my face — something soft, and creepy — oh, I don’t know whether we ought to go in there or not!”

“Don’t be silly!” Rosemary was close behind her. Now, instead of advancing, she put out an exploring hand. Then she laughed. “It’s a curtain, ’fraidy-cat! See, a velvet curtain drawn right across the door. At least, it feels like velvet — I can’t see a thing. Come on.”

She held the drapery back and the two girls stepped into the room, on carpet so thick and soft that their feet sank into it without a sound. All was intense darkness — not the shuttered dusk of the other rooms they had explored, but the black of deepest night.

Fumbling, and keeping very close together, they made their way toward the wall where windows should be. The room was wide, and the journey seemed endless. The curtain had fallen back into place over the opened door,

so that no ray of light penetrated. No furniture impeded their progress, although occasionally they stumbled over something soft which by the feel of it seemed to be a cushion.

At last their outstretched hands touched solid walls; or rather, silky softness with a feel of solidness behind. They groped about for a minute, and then Valerie exclaimed triumphantly, "There's glass here, I'm sure of it! But the whole wall must be hung with some sort of drapery. Wait, I think I've got hold of an edge."

She gave a sidewise tug, and the heavy fabric in her hand slipped back, exposing a window. By the dim light thus admitted the girls succeeded in unveiling the other two windows, and throwing them open they unlatched the heavy shutters outside.

The rain of the morning had ceased, and bright summer sunlight came flooding in, dazzling their eyes after the gloom. They turned their faces eagerly toward the room, but for a moment they could see nothing. Then Valerie gave a little awed exclamation.

"Rosemary! Is it *real*? Or is it — something out of the Arabian Nights?"

“Don’t ask me!” Rosemary gasped. “I’ve never seen anything like it, never! But — isn’t it *beautiful?*”

The draperies at door and windows, plain black velvet on the outside to exclude the light, turned to the room itself a surface of intricate embroidery on white satin. Gold threads and silver intertwined in strange blossoms, picked out with vivid green and rose. There were clusters of purple grapes and huge golden baskets heaped high with rosy pomegranates.

The walls were hung with soft white silk, gathered in close folds, and crisscrossed by a lattice pattern of wide bands of embroidery. These bands, gold-edged, were worked in a design of lotus blossoms, with pale green leaves and rose-and-ivory petals.

Underfoot was a wonderful old Oriental carpet in faded pale colors. Over their heads arched a canopy supported in the four corners of the room by slender gold spears; a canopy of heaven-blue set with silver stars.

The room held only one large piece of furniture — a deep low divan set against the wall near the door. Over it hung a huge tapestry depicting an Eastern hunting scene, with ele-

phants, horses, and hunters delightfully shown against a tropical landscape. The divan itself was of pale rose satin, tufted and padded to luxurious softness, and piled high with cushions of every possible color and shape.

“Well — let’s sit down and look this over!” exclaimed Rosemary.

Hand in hand they stumbled to the divan, and sank breathless into its soft depths. Then wonderingly they continued to look about them.

Scattered through the room were half a dozen low round padded stools, of the kind the French call *pouffes*. These were of rich brocades and satins, all in pastel colors. There were also three or four small tables, about the height of our modern coffee tables; these were gilded, their tops inlaid with mother-of-pearl. On the largest one stood a graceful tea set of exquisitely frail gold china. Another held a lamp of gleaming alabaster; on the third, a squat black elephant supported a large rock-crystal ball.

Rosemary clutched Valerie’s arm. “Those marble things in each corner — are they lamps? Did you ever see such wonderful carving?”

In each corner of the room, beside the golden spears, stood a slender pedestal of white marble, delicately carved in a leafy tracery of vines. The tops, shoulder-high, were urn shaped, pierced through in a pattern of flowers.

"Let's see." Valerie sprang up. "Oh, look, Rosemary — come here; this top lifts off. Um, does it smell good! Why, it's dried rose petals."

"Oh, yes, a potpourri jar. I've seen them. This one is different, though; it has ashes in it. I know — an incense burner! Two of each, aren't they? And, oh, darling, will you look at that marble screen!"

It stood across the right-hand wall of the room; a screen as high as Rosemary's head; a bit of lacework in stone.

"Lovely," Valerie agreed, leaving the potpourri jar to examine it. "What's behind it? Oh, a long mirror — and a stool in front of it. And this little golden cabinet that could have held toilet things. I should imagine this was a sort of dressing-room, shouldn't you?"

"Don't ask me! I'm getting more mystified all the time. Who planned a room like this,

and why? We're not in a sultan's palace, remember; we're in a girls' school in a little American town. Who'd want a room like this here? What's it all about, anyway?"

Valerie shook her head. "It's completely beyond me. But Miss Lucia told us to come back to her, and she'd tell us the story. Have you forgotten?"

Rosemary laughed. "I think I had forgotten that, and everything else. This place has simply taken my breath away. Well, come on, let's go — though I hate to go back to the everyday world again, after stepping into a fairy tale picture."

Carefully they closed the shutters and drew the curtains. Rosemary turned the key in the lock, and they hurried downstairs.

They found Miss Lucia sitting just as they had left her. She smiled as she saw them coming, and Rosemary told herself that she only imagined that the blue eyes were faintly pink-rimmed, as though the little lady had been weeping.

"Oh, Miss Lucia, it's beautiful!" Valerie exclaimed impetuously. "But please, we're

dying to know all about it! Why is that lovely room kept locked and darkened, and whose room is it, anyway?"

"Sit down, dears; it's a long story," Miss Lucia answered in her gentle voice. "The room — yes, it is lovely, isn't it? That room, dear girls, belonged — oh, a long time ago! — to Roshanara, Princess Royal of Patipur."



CHAPTER V

THE PRINCESS ROSHANARA

THE two girls threw themselves on the floor at Miss Lucia's feet, their faces eagerly upturned. Some common instinct held them silent, and the spacious old parlor was strangely still until the soft voice of the old lady began the promised tale.

"I don't think I've ever spoken to you, my dears, of my younger brother, Marcus? I was the eldest of a large family, and Marcus was the baby. Only the two of us survive now."

She paused, a far-away look dimming her blue eyes. Then, with an apologetic smile, she went on:

"Marcus was a darling little boy; so good, so earnest. It was no surprise to us when he decided in early boyhood that he would be a missionary when he grew up. He never wavered in his resolution. Immediately after

his ordination as a minister he sailed for India, to work among the unhappy poor there. He's stationed now at a place called Gingi, in the Madras Presidency. He's doing a great work, and I'm very proud of him."

Again she paused, and Valerie fidgeted impatiently. A very dry beginning, she thought, to what must be an exciting and romantic story, if it were to account for that fascinating secret room. Miss Lucia met her eyes with an understanding smile.

"We old people are apt to be a little slow in our story-telling, I'm afraid. But the story really begins with Marcus. And it goes back now, twenty-five years. To my brother's first assignment in the missionary field, the Native State of Patipur. At that time there was no railroad in the whole State, no newspapers, absolutely no modern life as we know it. The people cultivated their land in the most primitive way, lived in the leaf-thatched huts that their fathers had known, worshipped the heathen goddess Parvati, and knew nothing but poverty and ignorance. They were ruled by a Rajah who had absolute powers of life and death. He, of course, paid homage to

the British crown, but few English people ever found their way to his out-of-the-way kingdom."

"Gracious, what a place!" Rosemary interjected. "Didn't your brother nearly die of homesickness?"

"No, indeed; Marcus was very happy in Patipur. He began his work under the most fortunate circumstances. A year or so before, a new Rajah had come to the throne. His Highness, the Rajah Rai Singh, had been educated at the English College for Indian Princes, and was a young man of modern ideas, very different from the old uncle who had preceded him. He had great dreams of bringing civilization to his people, and he welcomed my brother cordially. The little mission church flourished from the start, and my brother founded a school at the Rajah's request."

"How interesting!" Valerie said politely, as Miss Lucia paused again. Privately she considered that the story was getting just a little duller every minute. Would Miss Lucia *ever* get to the point?

"The Rajah's wife, the Ranee, died during

my brother's first year in Patipur," Miss Lucia resumed. "Marcus never saw her, of course, as she was strictly *purdah*, but she was said to be one of the most beautiful women in India."

"I'm afraid I didn't quite understand that word, Miss Lucia," Rosemary interrupted.

"*Purdah*, my dear — an Indian word for secluded. The Ranee lived in her own palace, and was never seen by the outside world."

"Oh, my gracious, a *harem*?" Valerie asked, suddenly interested. "I've heard of that, but I thought it was only the Turks who had them."

"It's a Muslim custom, of course," Miss Lucia agreed. "You know India was conquered by the Mohammedans back in the Middle Ages, and they adopted some of the ways of their conquerors. Well, to get on with my story. The Ranee left one child, a lovely little daughter named Roshanara. Usually the Rajputs attach little importance to daughters, but Rai Singh was an exception. He had been devoted to his young wife, and in the little daughter who was named for her he found his only consolation. He had the finest of native tutors for her, and he gave to her edu-

cation and general bringing-up far more personal attention than most oriental fathers spend upon a mere girl. The child had a splendid mind; of all my pupils, I think she was the quickest to learn that I have ever known."

"You knew her, then?" Valerie exclaimed. "But of course — you told us the locked room belonged to her. Oh, do go on, Miss Lucia. Did she actually come here?"

"Yes, my dear. Marcus told her father that his sister kept a school for girls, and the Rajah thought it would be a splendid idea for her to spend a year under my care, learning the American ways which he so much admired. The Rajah himself paid my brother's expenses so that he might escort the child and her nurse to America. That was Marcus's last visit home, twenty years ago. I have never seen him since."

"How old was the Princess then?" Rosemary asked.

"Roshanara was — let me see, she must have been ten. Yes, because she had her eleventh birthday the week before she — she — " to the girls' surprise, Miss Lucia faltered here, and

it was with an obvious effort that she concluded, "she was taken home."

"It must have been a strange experience for her," Valerie observed. "Did she enjoy the life here?"

"I'm afraid she didn't." Miss Lucia sighed. "It was an odd thing; I've never been able to understand it. In class Roshanara was a very satisfactory pupil; shy, and hampered by her imperfect knowledge of English, but apparently interested in her work and grasping new facts with lightning quickness. Our discipline is strict, and there is no opportunity for social contacts in the classrooms, but my teachers and the other girls thought her attitude was friendly there. That's why it seemed so strange that she should act as she did when classes were over."

"What did she do?" Rosemary asked. "Give herself royal airs?"

"That is not a very elegant way of putting it, my dear," Miss Lucia said gently. "But it is true that the Princess showed a consciousness of her station by repelling all efforts to draw her into our community life. Family pride is a quality which we do not discourage

here, but in Roshanara it was exaggerated beyond all reason."

"Are you sure it was all pride, Miss Lucia?" Valerie asked quickly. "You see, I've been in strange schools myself. If the Princess was shy — you said she was, didn't you? well, a girl who doesn't feel at home sometimes tries to cover it up by — oh, by pretending to be very proud and haughty, as if she didn't care whether she made friends or not."

"That is very true, Valerie, I have seen it many times. But in my experience, if such a girl is treated with tact and kindness, she abandons her foolish attitude gladly after the first week or so. No, the Princess's case was not the simple problem which so many of my homesick girls have presented. It was something deeper, far more difficult to reach. I do not often feel that I have failed to understand my girls," Miss Lucia finished wistfully, "but I must confess that Roshanara remained a riddle to me."

"But what did she *do*?" Rosemary persisted.

"Everything." Miss Lucia spread her hands in a helpless little gesture. "We sometimes felt, all of us, as though there were two

Roshanaras. The Roshanara of the classroom, and the Princess Royal of after-hours. Her room was arranged before her arrival by Mr. Bhagwan Das, the Rajah's American business representative, who sent a corps of workmen to reproduce exactly the Princess's room in the palace at home. It was almost impossible to get her out of that room, except for classes. Kumari, the maid she brought with her, was in constant attendance, and she seemed to shrink from any other companionship. I had to insist that she come to the dining-hall for meals, but even there she demanded a separate table, with Kumari to serve her specially prepared food. She refused to join in games, or to mingle with the other girls at recreation time. She took no interest at all in our out-door sports, but preferred to shut herself into her room, playing some endless sort of Indian dominoes with Kumari."

"I thought she was supposed to be learning American ways," Rosemary observed. "That doesn't seem to be a very good way to go about it."

"Naturally it wasn't. I tried to tell her

that, but all my efforts to gain her confidence and reason with her were of no avail. I made every allowance for homesickness, and the difficulty of adjusting to new conditions, and I did not think it wise to try to force her to drop all her accustomed habits at once. But I did talk to her, or tried to, for I found her singularly unresponsive. The language was a difficulty. She knew no English when she came here, and though she was learning rapidly, it was hard to know whether I was making myself understood. She would answer me in monosyllables, glancing at Kumari, who was always present, as though for guidance. Kumari, who had been in service to a British family, spoke far better English than the Princess, and frequently interpreted for us. Our interviews always ended the same way. I would urge Roshanara to mingle with the other girls, to make friends and share in our school life. Kumari would translate my words into a flood of rapid Hindostanee. Then — then Roshanara would draw herself up in true royal fashion. ‘I am your pupil’, she would say; always the same words, as if she’d learned them by heart. ‘In the school-

room I submit myself to you. But here I am the Princess Royal of Patipur, and no woman may command me. Go! ”

“My word!” There was a very faint trace of admiration in Valerie’s voice. “I may have given myself airs, and been as disagreeable as I dared, but I certainly never went that far! Did she keep it up all the time, Miss Lucia?”

“All the time, for the three months that she was here. Then —”

“Three months? I thought she was to stay a year.”

Miss Lucia’s voice sounded suddenly strained. “Roshanara was removed from my care at the end of three months. By Mr. Bhagwan Das, acting on her father’s orders. I’ve told you that the whole town knows this story, my dear girls. Even the city newspapers carried sensational accounts of it twenty years ago. It’s old and forgotten now, but I — I shall never forget. The disgrace, the shame —”

The little lady was so painfully excited now that it was difficult to follow her. Rosemary laid a soothing hand on her arm.

“Don’t tell us unless you like, Miss Lucia.

We don't want to hear it if it distresses you to talk about it."

Miss Lucia smiled dimly and patted the comforting hand. "I'll be less distressed when you know, girls. Roshanara was taken away from my school because — because a very valuable jewel which she always wore disappeared under suspicious circumstances. Mr. Bhagwan Das believed, and reported to the Rajah, that it had been stolen."

Valerie stared. "Well, that's too bad, of course, but why did she have to be taken home? *You* couldn't be responsible if a burglar broke into your house."

"The house was not broken into, dear. On the morning the loss was discovered, our local chief of police examined the premises. The downstairs doors and windows were locked, and Roshanara's own shutters were tightly barred. We had never been able to persuade her to sleep with open windows, as we do. The detectives whom Mr. Bhagwan Das sent from St. Louis arrived the next morning, and they, too, were convinced that no outsider had entered the house."

"Well, but — oh, I see, they thought it must

have been done by some one in the house? The servants, or the other students? How dreadful!"

"It was a dreadful time, Valerie! Every minute of those two fearful days is imprinted on my memory. Kumari came to me at breakfast, almost out of her head with worry. She had discovered the loss when she was brushing the Princess's hair. She was insistent that the police must be called in at once, and to quiet her I did so. She also sent off a telegram to Mr. Bhagwan Das in New York. I did not take it very seriously at first, thinking that the Ruby must have slipped off its chain and fallen somewhere about her room. But after a thorough search failed to reveal it I, too, became worried. Chief Edwards was very considerate, but he was helpless. Then, early next morning, two strange detectives arrived. It seems that Mr. Bhagwan Das had wired to St. Louis, the nearest big city, to have them come at once. They were — oh, most ungentlemanly."

Miss Lucia shuddered at the memory. "Every one was questioned, and all belongings searched. My girls, the daughters of

fine old Southern families, were put through the most humiliating cross-examination, their rooms turned out, their most intimate possessions scrutinized. The parents were very indignant, and I couldn't blame them. My school lost many pupils that year; names that have been on the rolls of Hollingsworth Hall for generations. Oh, it was a trying time, my dears, a terrible time!"

"It must have been!" Valerie sympathized. "But I still don't see why they should blame *you*."

"It happened in my house, darling. Mr. Bhagwan Das told me quite plainly that the responsibility was mine; that I had exposed the Princess to association with thieves. He did not add if I were not myself the thief, but I daresay that was in his mind. The Rajah, with whom he was in communication by cable, took the same position. The end of it all was that Roshanara was hastily removed, the reputation of my school suffered a blow from which it has never recovered, and my brother was ordered to close his mission and leave Patipur, never to return."

"Well, *that* was unfair!" Valerie cried.

"What in the world could he have to do with it?"

"He suggested sending the Princess here — that was enough," Miss Lucia answered sadly. "The Rajah's faith in Americans was quite destroyed, I'm afraid. My brother's Mission Board inquired into the whole matter, and voted him guiltless, but they could not move the Rajah. Marcus was transferred to a distant station in Southern India, and no missionary of his faith has ever been admitted to Patipur since. It was a tragic business, my dears."

"But it all seems so silly!" Valerie burst out. "Even if some servant or some wretched kid did take the jewel, why make such a fuss about it? Surely the Princess had plenty more?"

"Oh, yes, but I'm afraid I haven't made quite clear what the stolen jewel was. It was known simply as 'The Ranee's Ruby', and had belonged to Roshanara's mother. But it had a historic significance which made it more precious than all the jewels in the Rajah's crown. It had been worn by that noble queen of Chitor who, when the Muslim Ala-ud-din

defeated her husband in battle and advanced to sack her city, herself fired her palace and perished in its flames. The jewel itself she placed about the neck of her baby daughter, given into the charge of a faithful slave who fled with the child to her father's distant kingdom. Years later, when Ala-ud-din's empire had crumbled and a Rajput again sat upon the throne of Chitor, he took for his bride the daughter of the brave queen, who brought her mother's jewel back to the palace. All this happened centuries ago, of course — it was in 1303 A.D. that Ala-ud-din made his raid upon Chitor. But the present royal house of Patipur traces its descent from the Chitor rulers, and the Ranee's Ruby has been the most precious possession of their queens ever since."

"Oh, I see," Rosemary said thoughtfully. "Well, of course, that *would* make a difference. It seems to me, though, that wearing a jewel like that was quite a responsibility for a ten-year-old girl at school. I suppose it was worth a lot of money?"

"It must have been, although I was never told its value. It was an immense thing, of deep red color, full of fire and life. I did

not consider it a suitable ornament for a schoolgirl, but Kumari told me that it had never been removed from the child's neck, and must never be while she lived. They regarded it as a sacred relic, you see. As a matter of fact, the chain on which it hung had no clasp, but had been soldered about her neck so that it could only be taken off by cutting the chain. We found the broken chain in the Princess's bed."

"Whom do you think took it, Miss Lucia?" Rosemary asked. "I know you can't prove anything, but you must have some idea in your own mind."

"That's just it, dear child; I haven't. I never have had. Nowadays I try to thrust it out of my mind, but at first I used to lie awake night after night, trying to solve the mystery. Dorcas and Jefferson were with me then, and old Aunt Fanny, who had been my nurse. I should as soon suspect myself as those faithful darkies."

"The teachers?" Valerie ventured. "Or one of the girls?"

Miss Lucia sighed. "I've told myself that it must have been one of them. But — I knew

and loved them all, and I simply can't think it."

There was a little pause, and then, with determined calm, Miss Lucia picked up her needle again.

"Well, there's the story, my dears. It's a relief to have told it. And Valerie, I think your father ought to be told. He may feel — after all, valuable jewelry has disappeared from this house, and never been recovered. Those rings and bracelets of yours worry me, dear. If Mr. Porter thinks it better, Dr. Bowman can find some other place for you to stay —"

"Miss Lucia!" Valerie's fine eyes blazed. "I won't let you say things like that! It's an insult to Father and me, too, to imagine that we'd think — that we'd think —"

"Valerie, *will* you keep still?" Rosemary laid a forceful hand on her arm. "She doesn't mean to be rude, Miss Lucia. She's just indignant that you'd think that *she'd* think her jewelry mightn't be safe in your house. Please don't say anything like that again, Miss Lucia — it hurts us both. Promise?"

The little lady smiled mistily. "I promise,

then. It's dear of you both — the confidence — it means so much — ” With an effort she mustered her old calm manner. “Don't let my story distress you, girls. It's all over and done with these twenty years. I was rebellious at first. It seemed to me that I couldn't go on into the years, not knowing — but one learns patience at last. I have schooled myself never to think of it now. Or almost never.”

“That's right, Miss Lucia.” Valerie scrambled to her feet. “Just thinking about mysteries doesn't solve them, so what's the use? Maybe it'll all be cleared up some day, and then you'll *know*.”

“I'm afraid not.” Miss Lucia shook her head. “But I'll try not to burden you girls again with my ancient troubles. And thank you both for listening, and caring, and being so sweet about it all.”

CHAPTER VI

THE QUEST BEGINS

THAT afternoon Rosemary, having said good-by to her little brother, found Valerie waiting for her as usual at the Sanitarium gates.

“It’s early; let’s sit in Spring Park a while,” Valerie suggested. “I can’t face that long walk home till it gets a little cooler.”

Rosemary agreed, and Valerie led the way to the shady little park across the street from the Sanitarium.

Spring Park was thickly planted with huge old trees, and dotted with comfortable rustic benches. Every Saturday night the town band gave a concert in the little band-stand, and all the citizens turned out to listen to the music and “drink the waters.”

Cavern Springs people had a loyal faith in the medicinal properties of the many springs

scattered through the town, and the Big Spring under its gingerbread pavilion in the park, was the most popular of all. Unlike the steaming hot springs about which the Sanitarium centered, Big Spring waters gushed icy cold. The taste, a blending of iron, sulphur, and other less recognizable minerals, was peculiar, and caused newcomers to make many a wry face. Miss Lucia had insisted, however, that the two girls needed the tonic properties of Big Spring water, and they dutifully drank a cupful every time they passed that way.

To-day, having visited the spring, they strolled over to their favorite seat, a latticed bower overgrown by a flowering Madeira vine. The rustic bench was open to the east, but back and sides were walls of glossy green and heavily scented white blossoms.

The little park was almost deserted at this hour. On a bench near the spring, a young mother read a magazine, one hand mechanically jiggling the baby carriage at her side. In the bandstand, two aged Confederate veterans bent over a checkerboard on a soap box between them. A fuzzy mongrel dog dozed at their feet.

Valerie settled herself comfortably and smiled at Rosemary. "Well?"

"Well what?"

"You're looking worried, my dear. And as you've just told me that Timmy is heaps better, it can't be that. Want me to tell you what you're worrying about?"

"Go ahead, mind reader. You can't possibly know!"

"Oh, yes, I can. And it doesn't take any mind reading, either. I know what's in your thoughts because the same thing is in mine. The only difference is that I'm not worrying. You read me a lecture on the foolishness of worry — remember? So, just to show you that I can practice what you preach, even if you can't, here's what I've decided. I'm not going to spend my time worrying. I'm going to gather my wits together and *do* something about it!"

Rosemary looked bewildered. "I guess you're not such a mind reader after all, Valerie. This thing I'm thinking of — there's nothing that can be done about it. That's why I'm worrying."

"I don't agree with you. I think some-

thing can be done. And I think it's up to us to do it."

"But we can't, Valerie! The Ruby is gone, the Princess is back in India — there's no possible way we can solve the mystery, after all these years."

"I was right, then!" Valerie exclaimed triumphantly. "We *were* thinking about the same thing. Listen here, Rosemary. Miss Lucia's been mighty sweet to us. If we could do something for *her*, something that would lift this cloud of sadness that's hung over her so long — well, I don't know how you feel, but it seems to me it would be a perfectly *grand* thing to do!"

"I don't see why you say you don't know how I feel!" Rosemary answered indignantly. "I'm just as fond of Miss Lucia as you are, and I'd do *anything* to help her! But solving the mystery is the only thing that would help her, and that's impossible, Valerie."

"Why is it? Who says so?"

"But Valerie, honey, you know it is. You heard what she said. They had private detectives from St. Louis on the case, as well as the Cavern Springs police. Everybody

was questioned, and the place was searched from top to bottom. What could we do, twenty years later, that they didn't do? And they never found out anything."

"I don't care," Valerie answered obstinately. "They were looking for a thief. What if there wasn't any thief? What if the ruby was lost accidentally, and never stolen at all? What if — listen, Rosemary. The Princess was just a little kid, and a rather peculiar one at that, from what Miss Lucia told us. How do we know that she didn't lose it herself, and pretend not to know anything about it? Children *have* done such things, you know."

"Why, Valerie — that's an idea, anyhow. She knew how important and valuable it was, and she'd be frightened to death if she lost it. Of course, it wasn't an honorable thing to do, to let the school be blamed, but —"

"But she didn't care anything about the school, remember. She was the Princess Royal, too good to associate with any one here. Why should she mind making trouble for them?"

"I don't know, Valerie." Rosemary frowned. "It doesn't seem exactly what you'd

expect from a Princess. I'd call it a pretty shabby trick, myself. But — I'm afraid it does sound possible."

"It's the *only* probable theory," Valerie answered eagerly. "I've been going over the whole thing in my mind. If the Ruby was stolen, what became of it? No one could wear it; it would be sure to be recognized, after all the fuss that was made. They couldn't sell it, either, for the same reason. Even supposing the thief wasn't some one in the school, but a professional from outside, it couldn't be sold anywhere. Maybe you don't know it, but when a really valuable jewel disappears, the police all over the world are notified. They watch the pawnshops and gem dealers, and if the Ranee's Ruby had been offered for sale they'd certainly have known about it."

"You know a lot, don't you?" Rosemary said admiringly. "Much more than I do about these things. I suppose that's because you have real jewelry of your own."

"Maybe," Valerie agreed. "There were only two things a thief could do with the Ruby. One was to offer to sell it back to the Rajah.

That hasn't been done, or Miss Lucia's brother would surely have heard about it. I can't believe the Rajah would go on blaming the brother after he'd come into touch with the real thief. That would be *too* unfair!"

"I think so, too. What's the other thing?"

"They might have cut the Ruby up into smaller gems, and sold them one by one. It would mean a big loss in money; they couldn't get anything like as much as the Rajah would have been willing to pay. Still, it could have been done."

"If that's what happened, it would have *had* to be professional thieves, wouldn't it? No one at the school would know how to go about a job like that. And the detectives, who ought to know, seemed perfectly convinced that it *wasn't* a professional crime."

"That's just it," Valerie responded quickly. "That's why I say my theory is the only probable one. It's so easy to imagine that the ring, or whatever held the Ruby to the chain, wore through. It fell off somewhere in the house or the grounds, and Roshanara didn't discover it till she found the broken chain when she went to bed. She just quietly said nothing,

let Kumari discover the loss, and let the school take the blame."

"I hate to believe it," Rosemary said. "It seems such a wicked, cowardly thing to do. But — why, if it's true, then where *is* the Ruby, Valerie? It can't be here. The place was thoroughly searched — twice, remember?"

"It *has* to be here, if the theory is true. Roshanara didn't know where she lost it; if she had known, none of this would have happened. The detectives were looking for a thief's hiding-place — in the girls' luggage, and places like that. Of course it wouldn't be there. It would be in some odd corner, some crack, or maybe in the long grass outside. Don't you know the curious places things seem to crawl into when you lose them — places you'd never think of looking?"

"Yes, that's true. Well, then, you think — what *do* you think we ought to do, Valerie?"

"Look for it, of course. The Ruby is *somewhere*. If I'm right, it's somewhere around Hollingsworth Hall. What we want is to know just where the Princess was from the

last time she was seen wearing it until Kumari discovered it was gone. That's going to be hard — I hate to question Miss Lucia and get her all stirred up again, but I don't see any other way to find out."

"It does seem a pity," Rosemary agreed. "It would be so much nicer if we could make our search without telling her, and come some day and put the Ruby into her lap. Oh, Valerie, wouldn't that be just perfectly thrilling? Wait a minute, I have an idea. She said Dorcas and Jefferson were with her when it all happened. They could tell us what we want to know, I should think."

"Of course — why didn't I think of that? We won't have to breathe a word to Miss Lucia. If we don't succeed, she'll never know, so she won't be disappointed. But if we do — oh, Rosemary, just think of it! Won't it be *wonderful*?"

"It'll mean some hard work, though," Rosemary warned her.

"Who cares?" Valerie scoffed. "It's worth it. It'll be worth it a thousand times over, just to see Miss Lucia's face! You aren't

weakening, are you, Rosemary? I want you in this with me. But whether you're in it or not, I'm going through with it."

"Don't be silly. Of *course* I'm in it! A real treasure hunt, with a real treasure at the end of it — try to keep me out! And here we thought this was going to be a dull summer! Why, it's going to be the most thrilling, exciting — O gracious, let's hurry back to Hollingsworth Hall and *begin!*"



Dorcas

CHAPTER VII

DR. MARCUS

DORCAS met them at the door, her round brown face beaming.

“Miss Lucia says will you-all please go right to the parlor, ef’n you please? She done had a s’prise. A mighty happy one, too, praises be!”

Wondering, the two girls hastened across the hall to the parlor, from the half-open door of which came the murmur of voices.

The partly shuttered room was dim, and for a moment they hesitated. Miss Lucia’s voice called to them, so happy, so youthful that they scarcely recognized it.

“Come in, girls. I have a visitor — some one I’m very anxious for you to know.” A man’s figure in clerical black rose courteously as they entered. “Tell me,” the thrilled, girl-ish voice ran on, “could you possibly guess who this is?”

Valerie and Rosemary shyly surveyed the smiling face of the guest. A gentleman of perhaps fifty, with a spare figure and thin bronzed face; dark hair plentifully sprinkled with gray; kind eyes as deeply blue and clear as a baby's. Certainly they had seen those eyes before.

Rosemary was first, though Valerie spoke almost in the same breath.

"It's your brother, Miss Lucia. The one from India!"

Miss Lucia smiled happily. "I told you, Marcus — the family resemblance is even stronger than when you were a little boy. But now let me do the honors a bit more formally. Miss Valerie Porter, Miss Rosemary Lovell — my brother, the Rev. Dr. Marcus Hollingsworth."

It was impossible to feel ill at ease with this kindly stranger. Though Dr. Hollingsworth's face had the strong mould of earnest purpose, there was droll humor, too. Inside of five minutes the girls were chatting with him as with an old friend, and listening interestedly to the account of his long voyage.

It was just like him, Miss Lucia said se-

renely, to give her no notice of his coming. Marcus had always been like that, boyishly delighting in surprises. The Mission Board of his church, launching an ambitious campaign for funds, had chosen him to make a tour of the United States, giving the various churches a first-hand account of the work their money was to support. His first speaking engagement was for early September, but the Board had given him leave of absence two months earlier so that he might enjoy a well-earned vacation in his boyhood home.

Valerie and Rosemary listened sympathetically, sipping the tall glasses of iced tea which Dorcas brought them. Miss Lucia's happiness was a joy to watch. When presently the girls made their apologies and slipped away to freshen up for dinner, brother and sister were deep in a flood of "Do you remember?" that appeared capable of going on forever.

The evening meal, a gala affair for which Dorcas surpassed herself with fried chicken and beaten biscuits, was scarcely over when the doorbell rang. It seemed to the girls that every one in town called that night to welcome Dr. Hollingsworth home. The great

old house, usually so empty and silent, rang with laughter. Miss Lucia, in her excitement prettier than ever, welcomed distant relatives and old neighbors with charming hospitality.

With difficulty Valerie caught her alone to say good-night. "Rosemary and I are going upstairs now, Miss Lucia. See you in the morning."

"Good-night, dear. I sha'n't see you at breakfast, though. Judge Livingstone's son is going to drive us out to Meadowmoor Farm to spend the day. The old Judge is bedridden now, and Marcus was his special favorite. We'll be starting at daybreak, long before you girls are up. Mind you eat a good lunch, and see that Rosemary does, won't you?"

"I promise, Miss Lucia. Good-night, and have a nice time. I'm so *glad* for you!" she added impulsively, and ran to join Rosemary on the stairs.

Valerie, in pyjamas and slippers, brought her hairbrush into Rosemary's room for the nightly hundred strokes which both girls faithfully practiced. Rosemary had left her door

open, and from the well of the stairway floated the sound of music. Miss Lucia's tinkly square piano, and a chorus of voices, many of them a little old and quavery, singing together:

“Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And never brought to mind — ”

And then, with a right good will, the rousing old missionary hymn:

“From Greenland's icy mountains
And India's coral strand — ”

“They're all glad to have him back,” Valerie remarked.

“I don't blame them. He's nice, don't you think?”

“I certainly do. I've never mingled much with ministers,” Valerie said candidly. “I never even saw a missionary before. I supposed they were terribly goody-goody, and preached at you every time they opened their mouths. I never dreamed they could tell funny stories and make you laugh till your sides ached.”

For a few minutes they plied their brushes

in silence, listening to the sweet old songs drifting up from below.

“Do you suppose he minded very much?” Valerie asked suddenly. “Dr. Marcus, I mean — about the Ruby. He doesn’t look sad, like Miss Lucia.”

“Of course he minded. Didn’t he have to give up his mission at Patipur and start all over in Southern India? It was worse for him than it was for her, really.”

“The Rajah will have to apologize to him when we find the jewel. Yes, and let him come back, too,” Valerie said, so firmly that Rosemary laughed.

“I love that ‘when’, darling. Not even ‘if.’ All right, we’ll let you tell the Rajah what’s what.”

“And don’t ever think I won’t!” Valerie answered fiercely.

CHAPTER VIII

AS DORCAS SAW IT

ROSEMARY and Valerie breakfasted alone the next morning. Dorcas heaped their plates with crisp golden corncakes, and when she returned to the kitchen they heard her singing over her work.

“Dr. Marcus certainly brought plenty of sunshine with him,” Valerie observed. “Dorcas is almost as thrilled as Miss Lucia.”

“She’s devoted to the family. Her mother was Miss Lucia’s nurse, and Dorcas herself was born on the place. She wouldn’t marry Jefferson till Miss Lucia agreed to give him work here. Dorcas told me all that herself, when I was pressing a dress in the kitchen one day.”

“Let’s ask her what she knows about the Ruby now, sha’n’t we? This is a heaven-sent day for our search, with Miss Lucia away.

And we can't very well begin without some idea of where the Princess might have dropped it."

"All right. Do you think we ought to tell Dorcas what we're trying to do? She'll think it queer, our asking so many questions."

"We'll have to tell her, Rosemary. Something, anyway. She may remember some little thing that will make all the difference. Sh, here she comes. You talk to her. You know her better than I do."

Rosemary nodded, as Dorcas entered with a plate of fresh cakes. "Dorcas, can you wait a minute? There's something we want to talk with you about."

"Yes'm, Miss Rosemary. Ain't them cakes tender?"

"They're delicious. But this is something else. Dorcas, do you remember when the Princess Roshanara was here? The girl from India?"

"'Deed an' I do, Miss Rosemary. Mammy was alive then. She was cook an' I was upstairs-maid. Me'n Jefferson wa'n't no more than a year married. Yes'm, I remembers it mighty well."

"That's fine. You remember the Ruby, then, and all the fuss there was about it?"

The colored woman shifted her feet uneasily. "Yes'm, I did hear some such talk," she admitted. "Maybe you-all want some more corn-cakes, Miss Rosemary?"

"No, thanks, we've had plenty. Dorcas; we're not prying into Miss Lucia's affairs out of idle curiosity. She told us the story of the lost Ruby herself, and all the trouble it brought her. We know as well as you do that that trouble has saddened her whole life."

"And that's a true word, Miss Rosemary. Her that never done harm to a fly, to be blamed like she was, it was a sin and a shame!"

"We think so, too. And we thought maybe we could do something about it, Dorcas. Yes, even at this late day. Maybe it's no use, but Miss Valerie and I are going to have a good try at finding what became of that jewel."

The tray which Dorcas had been holding clattered to the floor. "Bless Gawd! You ain't funnin', Miss Rosemary? You really means it?"

"We really do, Dorcas. We may not succeed, but we're going to try. And we'd rather

not have Miss Lucia know anything about it until we do succeed."

"No'm, Miss Rosemary, I won't say nuthin' to her. And if me'n' Jefferson can be any help, that's the onliest thing we wants. They's nuthin' we won't do, Miss Rosemary."

"We were sure we could count on you, Dorcas. And you can help us right at the beginning by giving us some information — things we don't want to ask Miss Lucia about."

"Yes'm, Miss Rosemary, I'll sure be glad to do that."

"Thanks. Now first of all — what is the first thing we want to know, Valerie?"

"About the Ruby," Valerie answered promptly. "What it looked like. There's no use searching without knowing exactly what we're trying to find."

"That's right. You saw the Ruby, of course, Dorcas? Can you describe it so we could recognize it?"

"I jes' saw it on the young lady's neck, Miss Rosemary. Yes'm, it was a mighty fine sight. 'Bout the size of a hick'ry nut, it was — not none of these little pig-nuts, but a good big shellbark. Shaped like one, too. Kinda

flat, not round all over. And — well, it was red, o' course. Not bright red like these glass rubies they sells at the dime store, but blackish-red, more like a oxheart cherry. Nor neither it wa'n't so shiny, 'cept just sometimes when the light fell right — then it'd send out streaks of red light clear to the ceilin'. It was a right purty thing, Miss Rosemary."

"How was it fastened to the chain, Dorcas?" Valerie asked. "With a gold ring at the top?"

"No'm, Miss Val'rie, they wa'n't no ring. The chain done went right thoo the Ruby. It was a real nice chain, too. It was gold, and all wove solid like a ribbon, but it wa'n't stiff, neither."

"Was it true that there was no clasp?"

"Yes'm, Miss Val'rie. That stuck-up colored woman what the Princess had — Kumari, her name was — she done told me it was cut off the queen's neck when she died and soldered onto the Princess's. It was some sorta voodoo charm, seems like."

"Well, that's fine, Dorcas," Valerie encouraged her. "Now let's see — that's all we need to know about the Ruby itself. Now what

we're trying to find out is when was the last time the Princess was seen wearing it."

"That's easy, Miss Val'rie. The detective gentlemen done settled that. She had it on at the supper table the night before. I see it myself, and so did the young ladies. But nobody remembered seein' it after supper, when they was all out in the yard for recreation."

"Was the Princess out in the yard?" Rosemary asked, surprised. "Miss Lucia told us she spent all her free time in her room."

"Yes'm, she done that, mostly. But Miss Lucia fair driv her out after supper, when the weather was nice, for to get some fresh air. That Princess didn't like fresh air no more'n a cat likes water, Miss Rosemary. She'd ruther set in that closed-up room and have Kumari fan her. But she was in the garden a little while that night, sure enough. She went up to her room before the other young ladies finished they croquet game, though, and Kumari with her. I see 'em go past the dinin'-room door whilst I was clearin' the table."

"And did she have the Ruby on then, Dorcas?" Valerie asked eagerly.

“’Deed an’ I never noticed, Miss Val’rie. The detective gentlemen ast the young ladies, but they hadn’t paid it no mind, neither. All they could make out was that she was wearin’ it at the supper table. Wa’n’t nobody remembered seein’ it afterwards.”

“The grounds are pretty big,” Valerie observed thoughtfully. “Do you know just where she was in the garden, Dorcas?”

“Oh, yes’m, Miss Val’rie, she never got off the path. Just walked up and down it, they did, her and that stuck-up colored woman, like lions in a cage.”

“Why do you call Kumari a colored woman, Dorcas?” Valerie asked. “The natives of India are dark, but they belong to the white race.”

“Yes’m, that’s what Miss Lucia says. It ain’t my place to argy with her, nor with you young ladies, neither. But she sure look colored to *me*,” Dorcas added stubbornly. “Blacker’n I am, any day. Callin’ herself a Indian, an’ she didn’t even have no feathers nor no blanket!”

“Well, never mind that,” Valerie said impatiently. “See if I have it straight. The

Princess went from the dining-room to the garden, where she walked up and down the path for a few minutes. Then she came in — through the side door? And across the hall, upstairs to the second floor, across the landing, upstairs to the third floor. Down the main corridor there, then down the little passage and into her room at the end of it. Is that the way she went, Dorcas? Are you sure?"

"Yes'm, that's the only way they is. But — is you-all figgerin' the Ruby might have been lost accidental-like, Miss Val'rie? Everybody said it was stole."

"What do *you* think, Dorcas?" Valerie disregarded the question for a moment. "Miss Lucia says she's sure no one connected with the school would have stolen the Ruby, and that there wasn't any chance of an outsider having broken in and taken it. Do you feel the same way about it?"

"Well, Miss Val'rie, it's always been a puzzlement," Dorcas answered. "Many's the time me and mammy used to go over it, tryin' to make it out. 'Twa'n't no burglar, that's sure. Jefferson locked up downstairs before he went to bed, doors and windows both.

Wa'n't no way to get up to them third-floor windows without'n a fireman's ladder, and the shutters was bolted inside. We'd all 'a' been mighty glad to hang it on some tramp, but they wa'n't no way to do it."

"And how about the people in the house?" Valerie prodded. "Wasn't there just one servant, one teacher or girl who might have done such a thing?"

"No, *ma'am!*" Dorcas shook her head vigorously. "Only other maid was my own cousin; wa'n't none of *our* folks took it. Some of the young ladies was kinda mischeevous, but they was the finest quality white folks in this state. So was the teachers. No'm, they wa'n't no thieves here. We don't have no such trash at this school."

"Well, then it *must* have been lost!" Rosemary cried. "You're right, Valerie, it couldn't have happened any other way. And if it was lost — "

"It can be found!" Valerie sprang to her feet. "Thanks a lot, Dorcas; we'll let you know the minute we find out anything. Come on, Rosemary, we're wasting time. We'll start with the garden and follow the Princess's trail upstairs. Oh, do *hurry!*"

CHAPTER IX

THE TORN LETTER

FLUSHED with the sun and stiff from stooping, the two girls answered Dorcas's call to luncheon. They had been over the garden path inch by inch, poking with sticks between the mossy stone flags, even turning over any flat stone which seemed the least bit loose. They had examined the ground for several feet on each side of the path, too, with the most conscientious attention to the low clumps of shrubs which bordered it. Jefferson, who had learned of their quest from Dorcas, came willingly to aid them, although his familiarity with the ground made him doubtful that any treasure might have escaped his diligent weeding and planting.

"Never mind," Rosemary said consolingly, as they took their places at the table. "The path is only one place — we could hardly hope

to find it where we first began looking. There are all those miles of corridors and stairs — dark as pitch, some of them, and that gorgeous old wainscoting full of cracks. And the Princess's room itself. Why, we haven't even begun to look yet!"

"Oh, I'm not discouraged, really," Valerie protested. "You don't care about dessert, do you, Rosemary? If we hurry, we can get in a good hour before we go to the Sanitarium. And thank goodness we'll have the whole evening. Miss Lucia and Dr. Marcus will stay for supper at the farm, won't they?"

"I'm sure they meant to. Come on, I've had enough."

The treasure did not come to light in the lower hall, nor on the first flight of the great stairway. Reluctantly the two girls abandoned their search to hurry off to the Sanitarium.

There was no loitering in Spring Park to-day. They almost ran back to the house to begin where they had left off. Rosemary brought her flashlight, and Valerie borrowed a thin silver knife from the dining-room. Dorcas dashed their hopes a little by telling

them that the thick old hall carpets had been taken up and cleaned every year since she could remember, with no sign of a ruby having secreted itself under their edges. This was so much to the good, though, as Rosemary cheerily pointed out. It meant that they needn't bother with the floors, but could concentrate upon the fine old oak paneling which covered the lower third of the corridor walls. The floors had sagged away from it in many places, leaving inviting cracks which could quite well shelter the fallen jewel. The girls took turns holding the light and running the flat knife-blade into these cracks.

Some quite remarkable finds rewarded their efforts. Innumerable pins, hairpins, pencils, a marble or two and a dusty lollypop came to light. One stubborn object which gave them unusual difficulty finally disclosed itself as a cheap tawdry lipstick, apparently never used.

"I'll bet there's a story behind *that!*" Valerie observed grimly. "Some fresh young thing who meant to show Miss Lucia a thing or two, and lost her nerve. She poked it in there on purpose, glad to get rid of it."

"I shouldn't wonder." Rosemary scrambled to her feet and ruefully rubbed her aching knees. "That finishes us here, Valerie. The staircase to the third floor is next, I guess."

They worked steadily on, and reached the little passage leading to Roshanara's room without further incident. The walls here were plain plaster, their low baseboard fitting snugly to the floor, so that only a glance was needed to show that they afforded no hiding place.

"Well, the room itself is left, and that's really the most likely place," Rosemary said gallantly. "We'll have to get the key, though. We should have asked Miss Lucia for it."

"We know where it is; in the little brass box on the what-not. I'll go get it."

"But we didn't ask her, Valerie."

"Oh, bother! She gave it to us once, didn't she? We *can't* ask her — she isn't here for one thing, and for another, she'd wonder what we wanted with it, and we can't tell her. Are you coming?"

"All right. I don't suppose she'd mind, as long as we're careful. We'll have to wash our hands, though, before we touch all that

lovely silk. Mine are positively grubby."

They stopped at Valerie's room on their way down to remove the grime of the search, and were surprised to find that it was well past meal time. They hurried downstairs, where Dorcas was anxiously awaiting them. She had hesitated to call them, and her face fell as Rosemary slipped into her place with a shake of the head.

"No luck so far, Dorcas, but we're still hoping. Could you hurry supper along, please? We haven't any time to spare."

"Well, it isn't here!"

Valerie tried to smile as she threw herself down beside Rosemary on the low satin divan which had served the little Princess for a bed.

Carefully, and restoring the exquisite orderliness of the lovely room as they went, the two girls had searched every inch of floor, turned over cushions, rolled back the silken rugs. Sunset flamed at the windows as they shook the heavy draperies, peered behind tapestry, pinched the pillows and examined the lamps. The day was fading into twilight when, utterly weary and disheartened,

Valerie voiced her disappointing conclusion.

Rosemary struggled in vain to find some reassuring answer. Her eyes roamed about the room, searching for some hiding place they might have overlooked. They fell upon one of the marble pedestals supporting a carved urn.

"The potpourri jars!" she exclaimed suddenly. "Did we look in them?"

"I did," Valerie answered gloomily. "Dead rose leaves in two of the jars; ashes of incense in the other two. Nothing that looked like the Ruby."

"Are you sure?" Rosemary persisted. "They're pretty deep. She could have been bending over one of them, and the Ruby dropped down among the rose leaves or the ashes — and got covered up —"

"It didn't, though. I ran my fingers right down to the bottom. Still —" Valerie rose with a flash of hopefulness. "There's no harm in making sure again. Let's empty them, shall we?"

"All right." Rosemary unwound a bright square scarf from her neck and spread it on the floor.

"You can dump the rose petals on this; then we won't have any trouble putting them back."

Valerie was already lifting one jar from its marble pedestal. The jar itself was marble, glistening white with faintly pink veinings, and delicately carved with twining roses. On the lid the rose pattern was pierced through, with leaf-shaped openings through which the imprisoned fragrance had once escaped to scent the room. Valerie lifted the lid and set it on the floor; then very carefully she held the jar above Rosemary's scarf and shook out its contents.

For a moment the two girls looked at the little heap of dead petals in silence, then Valerie managed a laugh. "Well, anyway, there are three other jars!"

The urns in which incense had been burned were of the same size and shape as the rose jars, but the carving represented trumpet flowers instead of roses, and they were lined inside with brass. They were filled almost to the top with light powdery ashes, still faintly scented.

The ashes from the fourth, and last, jar lay in a forlorn heap on the bright scarf.

Valerie, seated cross-legged on the floor, looked across at her friend.

“Well, this seems to end it, doesn’t it? The Great Search is over, and here’s all we have to show for it. A pile of ashes.”

Rosemary looked at her helplessly. Anxious as she had been to succeed for Miss Lucia’s sake, she felt Valerie’s disappointment even more keenly. Miss Lucia, after all, had long since resigned herself to the mystery. But this search had been Valerie’s idea; she had been so proud of her theory, so eager to test it! And now —

“I’m so sorry, Valerie,” Rosemary murmured. “But you mustn’t mind too much. It was just a chance; we were never sure, you know.”

“Oh, I know. It was silly of me to build my hopes so high.” Valerie’s slim white fingers began restlessly sifting the heap of ashes as she talked. “I might have known we couldn’t succeed where detectives and people like that had failed. But just the same — oh, it’s perfectly maddening! That Ruby is somewhere; it didn’t just melt away like a — like an icicle! And I still don’t believe it was

stolen! And if it wasn't stolen, it was lost; and if it was lost, it was lost here, in this house. It must be here, it *can't* be anywhere else!"

She clenched her hand vehemently among the ashes as she spoke. Then, opening her fingers, she looked down at them with a startled expression.

"Hello — I didn't notice this before!" Clinging to her palm was a wisp of crumpled paper.

"What is it?" Rosemary bent forward as Valerie straightened it out. The scrap was small, with charred edges, covered on both sides with curious marks in jet-black ink.

Idly Valerie raked about among the ashes, with the result that she presently had a pile of ten or twelve pieces of the thick torn paper, most of it burned about the edges. None of the pieces was larger than a square inch, and most were smaller. All were covered with tiny distinct characters.

"It must have been something of Roshanara's," Rosemary said. "I suppose that's Indian writing? I wonder why she burned it?"

Valerie, with sudden interest, had been bend-

ing over the scraps of paper, trying to fit them together. Now she said solemnly, "Rosemary, I believe this *means* something. Oh, don't laugh! We can't just stop here and give it all up, after all our hopes and plans. We have to find out what became of the Ruby, we just have to. You know that."

"Well, of course we have to, if we can," Rosemary agreed doubtfully. "But — you mean you think this torn-up letter might help us?"

"I do think so. Oh, don't ask me why — there isn't any reason; not any sensible one that I can explain, anyway. It's just a feeling. But — these scraps of paper must have belonged to the Princess. We don't know that they have any connection with the Ruby, I'll admit. But we don't know that they haven't, either, do we? They're the only thing we've found that even looks like a clue. And I believe they are!"

"Well, I'm not saying they aren't," Rosemary answered. "Only I can't quite see — wait a minute. This takes some thinking out. What possible connection *could* there be between the Ruby and a partly destroyed paper?"

Keep still a minute, will you, Valerie? I want to concentrate."

Valerie waited hopefully, her eyes on Rosemary's absorbed face. The room was darkening now. The long day of eager searching was drawing to its end, and the Ruby remained as maddeningly elusive as ever. If this last hope, this possible clue which might mean anything or nothing failed them — Valerie's high courage flickered distressingly. Oh, it couldn't end like this, it simply *couldn't*! There must be *something* to go on with.

"Got it!" Rosemary clapped her hands together. "Here you are, Valerie, a perfectly possible connection. I don't say it's what did happen, mind, but it could have been! And if it is, then it fits in beautifully with your theory that Roshanara lost the Ruby and was afraid to tell — it makes her look a little less detestable, too, though not much —"

"Never mind that!" Valerie urged her feverishly. "Go on, Rosemary — can't you see I'm just burning up with suspense? Tell me!"

"Maybe you won't think so much of it," Rosemary admitted, "but it sounds reasonable

to me. Just suppose Roshanara did as you said — lost the Ruby, and let Miss Lucia and the school take the blame. And pretty soon she found out that she was to be taken home. Now I don't suppose that that was exactly bad news to her. From what Miss Lucia told us she wasn't happy here, and she was probably glad enough to go."

"That's all right so far," Valerie put in impatiently. "But get on with it, can't you? You're so *slow*!"

"Well, imagine you're the Princess. You've lost your sacred jewel, but you've escaped punishment by making a lot of trouble for some one else — some one like Miss Lucia, who's been kind to you, or tried to be. You're going back to your beloved palace, never to see her again. Don't you suppose that even a spoiled, selfish little thing like the Princess must have been would have some sort of conscience-spasm about then? Not enough to confess and clear up the whole thing, unfortunately. If she did that, she'd have to stay. But suppose that she decided to compromise. She'd write a letter, admitting that she was to blame for the loss, and leave the letter behind,

to be found after she was safely home again. Then — ”

“Then even that little spark of honesty died, and she tore up the letter and burned it!” Valerie finished excitedly. “Why, Rosemary, that’s wonderful! What it is to have a mind like yours — I’ll never poke fun at your ‘concentrating’ again. Why — why, then, the paper *is* a clue! Oh, I knew it, I felt it all the time. I *told* you it was!”

“It isn’t a clue to the whereabouts of the Ruby, though,” Rosemary pointed out reluctantly. “Roshanara didn’t know that, remember. Now don’t begin to cloud up, honey. If it *is* a confession, it will clear Miss Lucia, and that’s what we want.”

“I suppose so, though it would be lots more dramatic to produce the Ruby itself. Well, come on, Rosemary, help me. We have to get this jigsaw puzzle together. Oh, bother! Some of the edges are burned — they wouldn’t fit now, even if they were meant to.”

“Looks pretty hopeless, doesn’t it? And we couldn’t read it if we did get it together.”

“Mercy, I hadn’t thought of that. Well, then, what’ll we *do*?”

“Dr. Marcus could help us,” Rosemary suggested. “He’d know the language, of course. I think the best thing for now is just to gather up the pieces and save them until we can show them to him.”

“And go to bed to-night without *knowing*? Oh, you reasonable people — you drive me wild! I suppose there’s no other way, though.” Valerie gathered all the bits of paper together and tied them securely into her handkerchief. “There won’t be a chance to talk to Dr. Marcus to-night, even if we wait up for them to come back. And I’m utterly dead. My back aches, and my shoulders, and my knees. Let’s go right off to bed, Rosemary. It’ll make the morning come faster.”

CHAPTER X

MOTHER INDIA

DIFFICULT though she found it, Valerie was obliged to control her impatience to show Dr. Marcus the letter. It seemed simply impossible to find him alone. When he was not visiting with old friends and neighbors, his devoted sister kept him company. Valerie thought it extremely trying that when Dr. Marcus settled himself on the veranda after breakfast, with the morning paper, Miss Lucia invariably brought her embroidery and sat beside him.

The third day after the finding of the letter, however, brought better luck. It was a beautiful morning of lazy summer heat. Miss Lucia and her brother were rocking peacefully on the veranda when a little negro boy came flying up the walk. "Mis' Jenny", one of Miss Lucia's oldest friends, had been "took

bad with the sun", while working in her garden. The little lady instantly prepared to answer the summons.

Rosemary and Valerie, idly turning over a garden magazine between them, were sitting on the veranda steps near Dr. Marcus. As Miss Lucia unfurled the ruffled parasol without which she never ventured into the sunlight, gathered up her dimity skirts and flitted off down the walk, Valerie flashed a triumphant smile at Rosemary. This was her long-awaited opportunity.

"Tell us about India, Dr. Marcus," she began artfully. "Rosemary and I were wondering the other day about the language. Isn't it awfully hard to learn? Father has a friend, a professor at an Eastern University, who is supposed to be a great Sanskrit scholar. From the way Father talks, I got the impression that — well, that it was *something* to know Sanskrit!"

Dr. Marcus smiled. "You're quite right, my dear. To be a thoroughly learned Sanskrit scholar is indeed, as you say, 'something.' I don't profess any such depth of knowledge myself."

"Oh!" Valerie's face fell. "But how could you talk to the natives, then? I should think you would have to know it."

"I'm afraid you're a little confused, Miss Valerie. India has such a multitude of languages and dialects that it's only natural. Sanskrit is the ancient language in which the ages-old Hindu books are written, and is studied only by scholars and native priests. I have a superficial knowledge of it, acquired at college, but to know it thoroughly is the work of a lifetime. Since my work deals with the present, not the past, I found it more profitable to devote myself chiefly to the study of Hindostanee, the modern vernacular which in one form or another is the common language of Indians to-day."

"Oh, I didn't know that!" Valerie looked relieved. "I suppose you've guessed that I don't know anything about India, really. Do tell us about Hindostanee, then. Is *it* difficult?"

"Why, no, I shouldn't say so, as languages go. English children in India pick it up very readily from their native nurses. Of course there are different dialects, depending chiefly

upon the religious sects of the people. A Muslim, or Mohammedan, for instance, uses the Urdu dialect, where a Hindu would use the Hindi. Our converts at the missions, though they are all Christians together, speak whatever dialect they brought over from their old faith."

"Now I'm going to expose *my* ignorance," Rosemary broke in. She had been listening, deeply interested, but hesitating to interrupt. At Dr. Hollingsworth's encouraging nod she hurried on.

"I'm all mixed up about Hindus and Muslims. Isn't *any* native of India a Hindu? I thought that was the word they used, because we'd taken 'Indian' for *our* Indians. Have I been wrong all these years?"

"Entirely wrong, my dear. But don't let it distress you. I've met plenty of grown men, educated men, too, among Americans, who had the same impression. Everywhere outside of America an Indian is a native of India. Our red men they call 'American Indians', or 'Red Indians.' Is it clear now?"

"It's getting clearer, thanks. But then — just what is a Hindu?"

"He is a person of a certain religious faith, as we would say a Baptist or a Presbyterian. Hinduism, which is sometimes called Brahminism, is the original religion of India, dating back into antiquity, some say as much as twenty centuries before the Christian era."

"I've read something about it," Rosemary said diffidently. "It's called Buddhism, too, isn't it?"

"My dear child!" Dr. Marcus shook his head at her. "Buddhism is something entirely different — a purer, nobler faith, to Western minds. It is true that Gautama Buddha, its founder, was an Indian of high rank. When, in the sixth century B.C., he preached his new doctrine, he found many followers in his own country. In the century after his death, however, India gradually reverted to the old ways, so that now there are but a handful of his followers there. You would have to go to China, and especially to Thibet, to find any considerable number of Buddhists."

Valerie stirred restlessly. Just when she had brought the conversation around to the Indian language, as a preliminary to asking

Dr. Marcus to translate the letter, Rosemary had diverted his attention to a discussion of historical religions. And this was such a wonderful opportunity, with Miss Lucia out of the way — really, it was too provoking of Rosemary! She reached out an apparently aimless hand, and gave her friend a quick pinch on the shoulder.

Startled, Rosemary glanced at her, to meet a warning frown. Through the pocket of Valerie's blouse she could see the bits of paper patiently awaiting attention, and she flushed guiltily. Dr. Marcus, however, talked serenely on.

“Next to the Hindus in number, we have the Muslim population — these two make up the major religious divisions, although there are many minor sects, among which so far we must include our own Christian congregations. Mohammedanism, or Islamism, to give it its correct name, was brought to India by successive waves of Northern invaders — Persians, Arabs, Turks, all of whom professed allegiance to the Prophet. Babur, the merciless Tartar who founded the Moghul rule which only ended with the English occupa-

tion, was a Muslim. In many provinces the native Hindus were forcibly converted or put to the sword, so there is little wonder that Islamism gained a firm hold in India. Most of the misunderstandings and quarrels which harass India today are due to this conflict of religions."

He stopped suddenly, with the trained speaker's quick perception that the attention of his audience was wandering.

"I'm afraid you're finding me insufferably dull, young ladies. I really didn't intend to deliver a lecture. Why didn't you stop me?"

"Oh, but we're enjoying it!" Rosemary protested. "There's so much we don't know; more than we can ever learn, it seems to me. Do you mind if I ask another question?"

Rosemary glanced at Valerie. She would show her that she, too, could manage things.

"I was so interested a little while ago when you were talking about the language — Hindostanee, wasn't it? Don't they use a different alphabet from ours?"

"Yes, indeed. There are several alphabets, all variations of the ancient Sanskrit. Indian wise men claim that they gave the numerals

to the Arabs, who, as you know, passed them on to us. The characters of the Nagari alphabet, the one most commonly used among modern Hindus, are the most artistic, I think. I'm sorry — he fumbled in his pocket. "I thought I had a letter here from one of our native teachers. I wanted to show you how the written Hindi looks."

"*Now!*" Rosemary whispered tensely to Valerie, who promptly slipped her hand into her pocket.

"Maybe you can tell us something about this, Dr. Marcus," she said, with a tremor of excitement in her voice. "Rosemary and I found these scraps of paper, and we wondered if the writing mightn't be the kind we're talking about."

"Hm, let me see." Dr. Marcus adjusted his glasses, and spread the bits of paper out on his knee. "Very interesting. Yes, this is the Hindi — how odd. Beautifully written, too; I should say by some one trained in the native colleges of law. I'm afraid it's a little too fragmentary to translate for you. Here is one word — 'the-thing-which-is-to-be-done.' And this phrase, 'so saith our

Lord — ' Hm. Why, what — no, it's impossible!" He held one of the fragments closer to his eyes, scrutinized it carefully, and laid it down.

The girls looked at him in amazement. The healthy color had drained from his tanned face, leaving it suddenly old, and worn, and very sad. His voice was unsteady when he spoke.

"There is a name mentioned here — one which I have not heard for many years, but which I have reason to remember. May I ask you young ladies to tell me exactly how you came by this paper?"

CHAPTER XI

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

VALERIE gathered her courage together.

“We’ve been wanting to tell you, Dr. Marcus,” she said tremulously. “It may seem to you that we’re meddling, prying into things that are none of our business, but — oh, we hope you won’t think that! We’re so fond of Miss Lucia, Rosemary and I, and we’re so anxious to help her — *please* don’t think it’s just silly curiosity!”

Dr. Marcus’s face relaxed a little.

“Calm yourself, my dear child. I am sure that neither of you would act from any but the highest motives. In what way are you trying to help my sister, and what have these scraps of paper to do with it?”

Valerie took a deep breath, and plunged into her explanation.

“It’s about the Ranee’s Ruby — you know,

the one that the Princess Roshanara brought with her from India and lost." At the name a deeper shadow fell across the good doctor's face, but Valerie hurried on. "Miss Lucia told us about it, Dr. Marcus. We were exploring the house — she said we could — and we found Roshanara's room, just as she had left it. Only it was locked up, and Miss Lucia guessed that we would be curious — we didn't ask her, did we, Rosemary? She gave us the key, and then she told us the story. And — well, it made us simply *furious* to think that she was treated like that. And we thought that maybe — oh, it sounds silly, I know, but we did think if we tried very hard, perhaps we could solve the mystery and find out what really did become of the Ruby."

"I see. A very kindly thought, my dear girls, though I fear a little impracticable. No doubt my sister appreciates the spirit of it, however."

"Oh, but Miss Lucia doesn't know!" Rosemary put in. "We haven't said a word to her, and we don't intend to unless we succeed. She's had enough worry and trouble over the whole business. It would be cruel for us to

bring it all up again unless it might be to end it for good."

Dr. Marcus nodded approvingly. "That is thoughtful. My poor sister has indeed suffered greatly, and unjustly, over this unhappy business. It would be a blessing if it could all be cleared up, but unfortunately there seems little possibility of such an event."

"You don't think the letter is a clue, then?" Valerie asked disappointedly. "We thought — oh, you tell him, Rosemary. You're better than I am at getting things straight."

Rosemary quickly outlined their theory that the Princess had lost the jewel accidentally, and described their search. She told of the finding of the scraps of paper in Roshanara's room, and rather shyly recounted the "confession" theory which she had thought out to fit the case.

Dr. Marcus listened with attention, but when she had finished he smiled a little sadly. "I'm afraid things don't happen so providentially in real life. This letter was not written by the Princess Roshanara."

He did not see the look of blank disappointment that passed over the faces of the girls,

for he was intently studying the scraps of paper spread out on his knee. Neither of them spoke. There seemed nothing to say in answer to that authoritative statement.

For the moment Dr. Marcus seemed to have forgotten them. He was trying now to fit the pieces of paper together, frowning when the burned edges did not fit. The fact that all the scraps were covered with writing on both sides added to his difficulty.

The girls watched silently. Presently he took out his penknife, and with infinite care split the thick paper, so that all the writing was visible at once. At last he seemed to have satisfied himself that he had arranged the pieces in the most nearly correct order. He took pencil and notebook from his pocket, and began writing, frowning, scratching out, writing again.

"This is the best I can do," he said at last. "I have filled in missing words by guesswork, so I can't vouch for the accuracy of the translation. But this, or something like it, must be the sense of the message."

He cleared his throat, and then very slowly he read aloud:

“ ‘Greetings, O Kumari. Thus saith our Lord Bir Bal, through his servant Bhagwan Das. The power of the Meddling One waxeth great beyond endurance. Therefore saith our Lord, the Thing-Which-Is-To-Be-Done, let it be done speedily, and in this manner.’ ”

“That ends the first page,” Dr. Marcus observed. “On the opposite side we find this:

“ ‘That She-Who-Is-Without-Charms be acclaimed wholly vile, and the might of the Meddling One cast down. Great shall be the triumph of Parvati thereby, and great shall be her reward to those who serve her.’ ”

“Is that *all*?” Valerie asked blankly. “Oh, that’s terrible! Not a word about the Ruby, or the Princess. It isn’t even written to her, is it? Kumari — that was her maid. We’ve been wasting our time and building our hopes on some crazy letter-from-home to the maid! This is positively the most discouraging thing that’s happened yet.”

“You said you recognized a name, Dr. Marcus,” Rosemary ventured. “Was it Kumari’s?”

“Eh?” Dr. Marcus had been studying his translation again, absorbedly comparing it

with the original. "Oh, the name. No, I didn't see the reference to Kumari at first. What caught my eye and brought back recollections — rather painful ones, I'm afraid — was the name 'Bir Bal.' "

He tore from his notebook the sheet upon which he had written the translation, and handed it to Valerie, with the original bits of paper. "I am truly sorry, my dear, that your discovery did not yield the results you hoped for. You were asking, Miss Rosemary — ? Oh, yes, about Lord Bir Bal. I am afraid my manner was a trifle brusque just now, young ladies — please accept my apologies. I was upset by the sight of Bir Bal's name. Perhaps if I tell you something of what that name meant to me in the past, you will understand."

He paused to collect his thoughts, and the girls waited tensely.

"I was a very young man when I went out to Patipur," Dr. Marcus began at last. "Enthusiastic, and perhaps not very tactful. The Rajah's warm welcome inspired me to great hopefulness, and with all my energy I set about what I believed was my sacred task, the

enlightenment and uplifting of the native people. I did not dream that I should meet with opposition. It was not for many months that I realized that there were those at court who did not share the Rajah's views."

He sighed. "Lord Bir Bal was a great noble. He had been a counselor of the old Rajah, and was highly respected by the young Rai Singh. He was bitterly opposed, however, to the Prince's introduction of modern ideas. He did not proclaim that fact openly, but gradually I was made to realize that he was hampering my progress step by step, in a hundred subtle ways. I have always felt that it was Bir Bal's counsel, aided by the reports of his nephew, Bhagwan Das, which caused the Rajah to act so hastily when the Ruby disappeared."

"It was Bhagwan Das who wrote the letter, wasn't it?" Rosemary grasped the chance to turn to a less painful subject. "Doesn't it seem queer that he should be corresponding with the Princess's maid?"

"That is easily explained. The Rajah at that time had large American investments, and Bhagwan Das, a brilliant young lawyer, had

been sent to New York to look after them. He acted as the Rajah's agent in this country, and naturally had charge of the Princess's stay here. Her tuition fees were paid from his office, and it was through him that she received her extravagant allowance. As the Princess was so young, he would transact all business matters with Kumari, who, by the way, was far more than a mere servant. She had been with the Ranee from the time of her marriage, and enjoyed the full confidence of the Rajah. In effect Kumari and Bhagwan Das together acted as the guardians of the little Princess while she was in this country."

"I see." Rosemary said thoughtfully. "That makes the letter a little clearer, then. Bhagwan Das was giving Kumari instructions of some sort. He says they're from Bir Bal, and I suppose Bir Bal got them from the Rajah. Rather roundabout way of doing business, it seems to me."

"Oriental methods *are* roundabout," Dr. Marcus agreed. "Western business men are invariably exasperated when they attempt any transactions with Indians. I daresay Orientals find our direct methods equally annoying."

I know that the Rajah's American ventures turned out most unsatisfactorily; so much so that they were discontinued within a few years."

Valerie had been studying the scribbled translation since Rosemary mentioned the letter.

"What does he mean by 'She-Who-Is-Without-Charms?' " she asked now.

Dr. Marcus shook his head. "Some mutual acquaintance, I presume. It is an uncomplimentary term which I have heard applied to spinsters — chiefly English ladies living in India, for among the Indians themselves unmarried women are very rare. A Hindu father would consider himself unworthy of the name if he failed to find a husband for his daughter, and he can only conclude that our old maids are so hopelessly unattractive that no man would have them."

"Well, I like that!" Valerie exclaimed indignantly. "Don't they realize that a girl would rather have no husband than just any sort her father might find?"

"Not a Hindu girl. And they'd find it quite impossible to believe that any girl could

reason in that way. A woman *must* have a husband — a good one, preferably, but if not, a bad one. That is only one of the many harmful attitudes which we are combating through our work at the missions.”

“Well, I hope you succeed!” Valerie exclaimed fervently. “My gracious, I never heard of anything so *dumb!*” Then, reverting to present problems, she went on anxiously, “You don’t think the letter is any good to us, Dr. Marcus? It’s our only clue, and I hate to give it up. I’ve just set my heart on finding out what became of the Ruby for Miss Lucia. And Rosemary has, too.”

“I’m sorry, my dears.” Dr. Marcus shook his head helplessly. “I can see no connection between the letter and the Ruby. Apparently it deals with some business affair between Bhagwan Das and the nurse. It sounds mysterious, of course, but that is only because so much of the document is missing. I have no doubt that, had the body of the letter escaped burning, it would afford us a very commonplace explanation.”

“I suppose you’re right,” Valerie answered dispiritedly. “But I hate to think it. Oh,

there comes Miss Lucia! You won't say anything about all this to her, Dr. Marcus?"

"Certainly not. But I want you to know that I, at least, am grateful for the friendly interest you young ladies have shown."

CHAPTER XII

NEVER GIVE UP!

RETURNING from the Sanitarium that afternoon, Valerie and Rosemary found that they were to have dinner alone. Miss Lucia and her brother were dining and spending the evening with friends.

The two girls finished their meal and retired to the side veranda, which was their favorite lounging place. It was here that Rosemary had seen Valerie give way to her grief, and it was here that their friendship had its beginning. Valerie spoke of that evening now as they settled themselves to watch the sunset.

“Do you remember that night when you found me, or I found you, out here? It’s only been — let’s see, not quite four weeks ago. But it seems to me it was ages! I don’t believe I’ve ever been quite so unhappy as I was that night.”

“You were generous with your misery, too. Perfectly willing to pass it around, with a nice big chunk for me. You certainly were mean that night, Valerie.”

“Well, how about you? You told me you didn’t like me a bit, and that the less we had to do with each other the better pleased you’d be. Nice sunny nature *you* showed, I must say.”

“Oh, Valerie, I didn’t say that! At least — well, maybe I did, but you surely know I didn’t mean it.”

“You did mean it, and a good thing, too. I must have been a perfect pest in those days. I don’t know whether you’ve noticed it,” she went on with a touch of shyness, “but I think I’ve improved a little — my manner, you know. Of course I’ll never really be like Miss Lucia, but — ”

“So that’s where it’s coming from!” Rosemary interrupted. “Of course I’ve noticed. You’re not a bit snippy any more, and you don’t go around with your nose in the air the way you did at first. It’s an enormous improvement, if you don’t mind my saying so.”

“I’d be fearfully disappointed if you didn’t

say so. Even Father notices it. He asked me this afternoon if I wasn't feeling well; he said I seemed to sort of slink into the room instead of bouncing in. I had to tell him that I was practising quiet grace. Poor dear, he was quite bewildered, but you could see he was pleased. After a while he remarked that my mother was the most perfect lady he'd ever known, and that I was growing more like her every day. I thought *that* was worth all the trouble."

"I should think so! Your father's getting better, isn't he, Valerie?"

"Oh, lots! He's stronger every time I see him, more like his old self. Dr. Bowman says he can have visitors now. I thought if your brother could spare you I'd like to take you in to see Father to-morrow. I've told him so much about you, and I'd love to have you two meet."

"I'd love it, too. Yes, of course Timmy can spare me. He's in the swimming pool most of the time, anyway, splashing around with a bunch of youngsters he's made friends with. I took some snapshots to-day — I want Mums to see for herself how his poor little legs are

straightening out. We just can't be thankful enough, Mums and I, that our doctor sent us here."

"Me, too! Miss Lucia was right, wasn't she? Do you remember that day we came, she told us Dr. Bowman didn't accept patients he couldn't help? I thought she was just trying to cheer us up then, but she knew what she was talking about, bless her!"

"You're pretty fond of Miss Lucia, aren't you, Valerie? And you came prepared thoroughly to dislike her, and every one in her house."

"Must you bring that up? I thought I'd lived down those days. Yes, I am fond of Miss Lucia — even more than you are, I think. You have your mother, but I've never had any one. I mean any older woman, to look up to, and pattern after. I think Miss Lucia's perfectly darling!"

"Well, so do I. You needn't think you're the only admirer she has around here."

"I know. And, oh, Rosemary, I do wish we could do what we want to for her! To save my life I don't see how we can, but it seems to me I just can't give it up."

"You mean about the Ruby?"

"Yes. I was pretty much discouraged after our talk with Dr. Marcus this afternoon, but I'm beginning to get a little glimmer of hope back. Enough to go on with, anyway. After all, we haven't proved that the letter has nothing to do with the Ruby. It's a mysterious-sounding thing, even Dr. Marcus admitted that. The way I see it, it's as though we were lost in a wood, and here's a tiny, hopeless-looking path in front of us. It's no good standing there and saying you can't see any reason why that path should lead us home. Maybe it won't, but we have to explore it to find out, don't we? Especially if it's the only path in sight."

"I see what you mean." Rosemary was struck with Valerie's unusual logic, as well as with her earnestness. "There's something in it, too. A lot of great discoveries would never have been made if people hadn't been willing to take a chance that looked pretty feeble. I don't see, though," she went on unwillingly, "how we're going to follow your path. I'll be right behind you if you can find the way, but it doesn't seem to me that the letter *leads* any

place. More like a stone wall than a path, if you ask me."

"Rosemary, *please!*"

"I'm sorry, honey. I don't mean to be pouring cold water all the time. If you'll think of something to do I'll try my best to help. I'm just as anxious to get to the bottom of this as you are, but it's only that I don't know how."

"Well, I don't either, but that doesn't mean that there isn't a way," Valerie answered doggedly. "If we only had the rest of the letter! I do think Kumari might have been a *little* more careless with it! Tearing it up was enough; she didn't have to make it harder by burning most of it."

Rosemary checked a laugh at Valerie's ag-grieved tone. "Which was Kumari's room, I wonder? Maybe she left some bits lying around there."

"I never thought of that!" Valerie's face lighted up. "Good for you, Rosemary, — you have *all* the bright ideas! Let's go ask Dorcas right away — it isn't too late to have a look to-night."

"I'm afraid you'll have to wait till morning,

Valerie. Dorcas and Jefferson have the evening off — I think there's a wedding down in Darkey-town."

"Oh, bother! It seems to me all we do is wait. Well, at least there's something to wait for. And some way, I do feel more hopeful than I did this afternoon. As long as we can keep going I don't mind. Do you know the only thing I dread, Rosemary? It's coming to the place where I have to sit down and say, 'Well, there's nothing left to try. I give up.' Anything but that!"

"But it'll never come to that," Rosemary assured her, speaking more confidently than she felt. "There'll always be something to try. Wait and see."

"I'm waiting. And I warn you right now, I'm going to try *everything*, no matter how hopeless it looks. Whatever happens, I will *not* give up."

CHAPTER XIII

SOMETHING ABOUT KUMARI

“THAT Kumari? No’m, Miss Rosemary, she didn’t have no room like reg’lar folks. She didn’t do nuthin’ like reg’lar folks, nohow. Not like white folks nor black ones, neither. She was funny, that Kumari, awful funny, and many’s the time I done said so to Miss Lucia.”

Dorcas’s hands continued their busy clatter of the breakfast dishes, while the two girls in the sunny kitchen window patiently awaited the information for which they had asked. They had already discovered that Dorcas enjoyed talking, and that the simplest thing was to allow her to run on, picking out the important points and overlooking the rest.

“Miss Lucia told us that Kumari spent most of her time in the Princess’s room, when classes were over,” Rosemary observed.

“Yes’m, Miss Rosemary, that’s right. You-

all seen that room, ain't you? It's just like they fixed it for the Princess. Miss Lucia wouldn't never have nuthin' changed since she done went off and left it like that."

"Why was that, Dorcas?" Valerie asked. "I've been wondering. Why didn't the Princess take her furnishings with her? Were they left as a gift to the school?"

"No'm, I should say not. None of our young ladies would have no use for them heathen fixin's, purty as they is. I'll tell you why they was left, Miss Val'rie." Dorcas's soft voice deepened to anger. "That colored lawyer-man what come after the Princess and made all the fuss, he 'lowed that them curtains and things wa'n't fit to touch nohow. He said they'd been ruined by bein' in a house with — with — well, it's his sayin', and I'm ashamed to take the words in mouth. But he done said, Miss Val'rie, that them things was pol — pol — yes'm, *polluted*, from bein' in a house of thieves, and they wa'n't nohow fit for the Princess to use no more."

"Dorcas!" Valerie was inexpressibly shocked. "He didn't say that to Miss Lucia?"

"Yes'm, he done so. Right before them

there detectives he brung down here, too. Oh, you-all don't know how mighty mean that man was, Miss Val'rie. The way he talked to Miss Lucia would make your blood boil, it sure would. And her such a lady, poor lamb, she wouldn't sass him back. Even after it was all over, and he'd took the Princess and gone, she never said a ugly word. 'We'll leave the room as it is, Dorcas,' she says, and turned the key in the lock with her own hands. 'You'll find the key in my little brass box,' she says. 'Go in and dust when you think it's needed, without astin' me. The matter is closed,' she says, and swep' down the stairs with her head up, and goes in her room and shuts the door. From that day to this she's never mentioned it to me. Oh, she's proud, Miss Lucia is, like all the Hollingsworths. Yes'm."

Valerie and Rosemary exchanged sympathetic glances. The picture of little Miss Lucia, gallantly playing the lady in the face of humiliation, was a moving one, and it strengthened their resolve to bring about her vindication if it lay within their power.

"Now about Kumari, Dorcas." Rosemary

practically swung back to the present issue. "You say she didn't have a room of her own? Where did she sleep, then?"

"'Deed and I don't b'lieve that woman *did* sleep, Miss Rosemary. She done have a mat in the corner of the Princess's room, and I reckon she dozed off there. But they was always a light burnin', and I reckon she was up and down a good part of the night. You wouldn't believe how that child was babied, Miss Rosemary! Hot nights Kumari would set fannin' her, and she was always a-fetchin' drinks or tellin' stories or even a-singin' lullabies. You'd 'a' thought the Princess was ten days old 'stead o' ten years. Yes'm."

"The Princess doesn't seem to have been very considerate," Valerie remarked.

"Well, 'twa'n't her fault so much, Miss Valerie. I blames that Kumari more'n anybody. Course the Princess was plenty spoiled when she got here, but Miss Lucia could 'a' straightened her out, like she's done to plenty that ain't had the right raisin'. It was Kumari made all the trouble, keepin' the young'un stirred up all the time. Ef'n she'd been left behind, the little Princess would 'a' got over

her baby ways and been better off for it. That Kumari was always a-puttin' in her oar when the other young ladies tried to be friendly, tellin' the Princess they was makin' fun of her and all such like. Oh, I seed a lot, Miss Rosemary. Miss Lucia's death on tattlin', so 'twa'n't no use goin' to her about it. But that Kumari was jealous as all git-out, and she didn't aim to have her Princess settlin' down comfortable-like here. No sir, not ef'n she could help it. And she could."

"Well, that's very interesting," Rosemary remarked. It was quite evident that Dorcas was strongly prejudiced against Kumari; whether with or without reason Rosemary had no means of knowing. There were more important points to be settled now.

"Kumari didn't have any room of her own, then? Just a corner of the Princess's to take cat naps in?"

"Oh, she had a place to keep her things, Miss Rosemary. And I reckon she caught up on sleep whilst the Princess was at class in the daytimes. Miss Lucia wouldn't let Kumari follow her into the classrooms, though she raged and sulked about it. Yes'm, she had

plenty chance to sleep. Wa'n't nuthin' else to do; shut up by herself down there in the old spring house all day."

"The old spring house, Dorcas? I don't think we've heard about that."

"Shucks, Miss Rosemary, you-all knows the old spring house. There 'tis, right out the window behind you."

Turning, the girls followed the pointing finger to the end of the kitchen garden. A row of outbuildings stood there; the great dis-used stable with its carriage house, a capacious woodshed and a ruined brick bake-oven. The spring house was in a far corner, separated from the others. It was so low that the heavy timbered roof seemed at places to rest almost upon the ground instead of the squat stone walls.

"I never noticed it before," said Rosemary. "Do you mean to tell us Kumari lived out there? Didn't she freeze in the winter?"

"Laws, Miss Rosemary, we don't have no freezin' winters down here! 'Sides, it's always warm in the spring house, on account'n the water keeps the air het up. But it ain't no place for a body to live, and that's a fack.

That Kumari, she done picked it out herself, and nuthin' Miss Lucia could say done move her. I told you she was funny, Miss Rosemary."

"Is it a hot spring, Dorcas? Like the one at the Sanitarium?"

"Yes'm, Miss Val'rie. Back in Reconstruction days our spring was powerful useful, I've heerd Mammy say. She say they wa'n't no bathrooms in the Hall then, and the young ladies done took they baths in the spring house. Yes'm. She say it was a reg'lar Sat'dy-night exercise, and Miss Araminta — that was Miss Lucia's aunt what run the school in them days — she was mighty partic'lar. Wa'n't no young lady 'scused from bathin' on a Sat'dy night less'n she brung a letter from her ma sayin' as how she was delicate. No'm. Wasn't no gittin' out of it. Awful partic'lar, Miss Araminta was."

"Positively inhuman, I'd call her," Valerie agreed gravely. "I'm glad she had a little mercy on the delicate young ladies, though. Rosemary, what are we waiting around for? Surely the next step's plain enough."

"Explore the spring house, you mean? Of

course! Can we go in, Dorcas? Is it locked?"

"Yes'm, Miss Rosemary. They's some mighty mischeevous boys in this neighborhood, and we keeps all them old sheds locked up. Here's the key." She produced it from the kitchen table drawer. "Sho, no, Miss Lucia won't mind. Didn't she tell me you young ladies was to be just like you was at home?" Her glance held Rosemary's for a moment as she offered her the key. 'Scuse me, Miss Rosemary, but is you-all still stickin' to what we was talkin' about? 'Tain't none of my business, but me and Jefferson is powerful int'rested. Ef'n we-all can help — "

"Thanks, Dorcas, we won't forget to call on you. Yes, we're sticking to it. We haven't found out anything yet, but we're not going to give up. All right, Valerie, I'm coming!"

With a parting smile to the faithful negress she sped after her friend.

CHAPTER XIV

THE OLD SPRING HOUSE

THE stone doorway was so low that the two girls had to stoop; there were two steps down to the floor, but even then the ceiling almost brushed their heads.

A gust of warm air greeted them as they entered, bearing the heavy smell of sulphur which they had learned to associate with most of the springs of the region. Sunshine filtered in through two small barred windows set under the roof. There was no glass in these windows, and under each of them lay a drift of withered leaves from many autumns. It seemed unlikely that the place had been used, or even entered, since the long-ago days when the mysterious Kumari had chosen it for her home.

“She must have been crazy, to want to live here!” Rosemary exclaimed, stumbling across

the stone floor. "Oh, Valerie, be careful, there's a big crack in the floor."

The little house was roughly square, about eight feet each way, they guessed it. The walls were the same hand-dressed stone they had seen outside; the floor was a natural outcropping of rock smoothed down a little. It felt warm under the feet; a hint of the subterranean stream which flowed beneath.

Running through the exact middle of the room was a deep crack, beginning no wider than a pencil at one wall, but rapidly broadening into a triangle. This larger end made an adequate bathtub, equipped by Mother Nature with an endless supply of running hot water. The little stream flowed away under a natural stone arch at the big end of the "bathtub", vanishing into darkness. The current here in the spring house was gentle, but from the arch beyond came a constant murmur, as though the waters hurried once they passed out of human sight.

"What a weird place!" Valerie exclaimed. "Can you imagine any one choosing it to live in? Look, Rosemary. This must have been Kumari's bed."



"Oh, Valerie, be careful, there's a big crack in the floor!"

In a corner near the small end of the crack was a narrow wicker cot, with head raised like a *chaise longue*. There were neither cushions nor coverings, but one leg was broken, so that it wobbled dangerously as the two girls, disregarding a cloud of dust, perched themselves upon it.

On the floor beside the bed was a cheap coconut-fibre mat. A wooden bracket fixed in the wall over the bed held an empty kerosene lamp, its smoke-blackened chimney broken. There was no other furnishing of any description.

It was all too plain that this present quest must end before ever it began. There was no incense burner here; no rug to turn back, no pillows to remove. The bare little room offered no place of concealment for secrets. Stone walls and floor, a rickety bed, an endlessly-flowing stream of not-too-fragrant hot water — this was the spring house, and nothing more.

Rosemary glanced sympathetically at Valerie's downcast face, and began at once to make conversation.

"Kumari seems to have taken *her* belong-

ings, all right. I suppose, not being in the house, they escaped Miss Lucia's evil influence. I wish I could see Mr. Bhagwan Das just once. I'd like to give him a piece of my mind for saying such a ridiculous, cruel thing to her!"

"I'd like to slap his face for him!" Valerie answered, so viciously that Rosemary laughed.

"And of course that would please Miss Lucia 'most to death. To have a young lady who's taking her as a model go around slapping strange gentlemen's faces — she'd just love that. Showing what a wonderful example she turned out to be."

Valerie laughed, too, a little unwillingly. "Can you imagine Miss Lucia doing such a thing? But goodness knows this Bhagwan Das person needed slapping, if any one ever did. Oh, Rosemary, darling, I'm just in *despair*! This place is no help to us. There isn't a clue in sight, and no place to look for one. What in heaven's name do we do next?"

Rosemary shook her head. "I'm sunk, too. I did hope we could find something here, but — listen, some one's coming."

"It's me, Miss Rosemary." Dorcas stood

in the open door. "They's a note just come for Miss Val'rie. The boy said wasn't no answer needed, Miss."

"Thanks, Dorcas. Oh, it's Father's writing." Rosemary noted that her hand trembled as she opened it, but in a minute she smiled. "Gracious, I was afraid for a second it was bad news, but it's good! I told you Dr. Bowman said he could have visitors, Rosemary? He asks me to bring you over and have luncheon with him. The Doctor never allowed that before; it must mean that Father's a lot stronger. Isn't that wonderful? You'll come, won't you?"

"Love to." Rosemary rose. "I'll have to change my dress; this one is a perfect smear of dust. Dorcas, you ought to know. Why in the world did Kumari choose a place like this to live in?"

"Well, I tell you, Miss Rosemary." Dorcas settled herself comfortably against the door-frame. "That Kumari was a awful funny woman. She talked purty free to me, bein' more her own color like, though she wa'n't a lady I'd ever feel like makin' no intimate friends with. No *ma'am*. She had too many

queer heathen ways. No better'n a voodoo woman, she wa'n't, ef'n you's astin' me."

"What's a voodoo woman?" Valerie began, but Rosemary hushed her. Dorcas, unchecked, would wander on indefinitely and Rosemary was genuinely interested in getting an answer to the present question. "But what did she want to live here for, Dorcas?" she insisted patiently.

"Well, now, Miss Rosemary, this is what she done told me her own self. She say in her village off there where she come from they's a spring like this'n, and it's a holy place. Seem like they's a temple built over the spring like this. Some sort of heathen idol in it, what they believe in. Yes'm. Kumari say the water is hot, just like this, and has the same funny smell. She say folks that's sick come bathe in the holy spring and get well, and dyin' people gets carried there to have they feet stuck in it, so they can walk straight into heaven. Such wicked foolishment she talk I never hear in all my born days, but that's what Kumari say."

"Why, how odd!" Valerie exclaimed interestedly. "I suppose there are hot sulphur

springs in the Indian hills — why not? Poor Kumari, she must have been terribly homesick, and I guess it comforted her to be near something that seemed familiar.”

“You-all don’t need to waste no poorin’ on *her*, Miss Val’rie,” Dorcas answered darkly. “She was a voodoo woman, now I’m tellin’ you. Many’s the time I see her settin’ here, cross-legged on the rock, makin’ voodoo charms and mumblin’ over ’em. I tell you she was funny.”

“What kind of charms, Dorcas?” Valerie asked.

“All kinds, Miss. She’d make little boats outta tree bark, and load ’em up with the funniest things. Flowers wove into kinda mats, and cherries off the tree, or mebbe a young carrot or a green onion. She was always a-huntin’ around in the yard for things to make charms of, and then she’d set here weavin’ ’em and a-fixin’ ’em up, and all for nuthin’ when she got ’em done. Jes’ throwed ’em in the water, she done, and started out lookin’ for somethin’ to make more. I tell you that Kumari, she was funny!”

“She must have been,” Rosemary ended the

conversation with a warning glance at Valerie. "We'd better get along and get dressed, Valerie. I want to make a good impression on your father. Will you lock up here, Dorcas? And thanks for calling us."

"You know what I think?" Valerie asked solemnly, as they hurried up the path. "I think maybe Kumari was funny!"

"Seems to me I heard some rumors to that effect." Rosemary chuckled. "You just have to tear yourself away when Dorcas gets on that subject — she'd talk about Kumari all day."

"Yes, and that proves that Kumari was — well, something out of the ordinary. That she should have made such a tremendous impression on Dorcas."

"Oh, she was a mysterious creature, there's no doubt about that."

"Entirely too mysterious! Have you noticed, Rosemary, that every time we start out to learn something about the Ruby we come smack up against Kumari? And the more we learn about her, the less we know. I'm beginning to wonder —"

She broke off abruptly and walked a few

steps in silence, her eyes frowningly on the path before her.

“Yes? You’re beginning to wonder what?” Rosemary prompted.

“Well, whether we couldn’t investigate Kumari herself, for a change? Aside from Dorcas’s chatter, we know almost nothing about her. What sort of person was she, anyway? She seemed to have a great deal of influence over the Princess — naturally she would have, being her only friend from home and the only person who spoke her language. You remember Miss Lucia was puzzled because Roshanara was so different in the class-room from what she was outside of it? Well, as nearly as I can make out, Kumari wasn’t with her in school hours, but she *was* with her at all other times. Doesn’t that suggest something to you?”

“You mean that it was Kumari who insisted that the Princess assert her royal dignity the way she did? I keep forgetting what a little thing she was — only ten. Why, yes, I suppose that is possible. Especially if we can believe Dorcas, that Kumari prejudiced her against the people here, and told her they were

making fun of her. I'm not certain we can believe that, though, Valerie. Dorcas is prejudiced herself, against Kumari, and she'd be likely to exaggerate anything like that."

"To exaggerate it, yes, but she wouldn't make it up out of whole cloth, would she? There must have been some truth in it. Especially when you remember what Miss Lucia told us of the way the child acted. It sounds like a perfectly good explanation to me."

"I believe you're right, Valerie," Rosemary answered slowly. "And if you are — yes, I see what you mean. If Kumari had such a strong influence over the Princess, it's important to know as much about *her* as we can find out. I wonder how —"

"Dr. Marcus, of course," Valerie replied decisively. "At the very first chance — oh, good heavens, Rosemary, do you know it's after twelve o'clock this minute?"

"And I've been trying to hurry you for the last half-hour." Rosemary grinned. "Put away the Ruby problem for now, honey. The important question before the house now is, *what* shall I wear to do you credit when I meet your father?"

CHAPTER XV

THE SACRED POOL OF HAMIR

“YES, she was a strange woman.”

Dr. Marcus relaxed comfortably in the old hickory rocking-chair, his mild blue eyes fixed on the far horizon.

The girls had had what Valerie described as a bit of luck this afternoon. After their pleasant luncheon with Mr. Porter, who had shown himself genuinely pleased with his daughter's new friend, the nurses had dismissed them earlier than usual. They had gone around to the children's wing to see Timmy, but found him busy practising for the water carnival to be given shortly by the small patients. Rosemary and Valerie had gone home then, to find that Miss Lucia had not yet come downstairs from her afternoon nap, and Dr. Marcus was consequently alone on the ver-

anda. Valerie had hastened to make the most of her opportunity.

"I didn't know Kumari well, of course," Dr. Marcus went on. "I doubt whether it would be possible for any Occidental to know her well. She was a product of the East; that mysterious, brooding East which molds her children in strange ways. Kumari had attended the Ranee, Roshanara's mother, and she was fiercely loyal to the child. I accompanied the two of them on their journey here, you know, but I am sorry to say I never felt that I had completely won Kumari's confidence."

"She wasn't one of your mission flock, was she, Dr. Marcus?" Rosemary asked.

"No, indeed, far from it! Kumari was a devout follower of Parvati, the national goddess. Her native village houses one of the most famous of the Parvati shrines, the Sacred Pool of Hamir, and the old faith was bred in her bones."

"That must have been what she told Dorcas about," Valerie observed. "Dorcas told us Kumari said there was a spring in her native village very like the one down in the old spring

house. She chose the spring house for her room because it reminded her of the Sacred Pool at home."

"Indeed? I hadn't heard that. I knew our old spring house well as a boy, of course, although it has been years since I've visited it. Yes, now that I think of it, it is very like Hamir. The same heated waters and sulphurous vapors — I can see that it must have comforted Kumari to find it in a strange land."

"Is the Sacred Pool in Patipur?" Rosemary asked.

"Yes, but not in the capital city. It is in a little hill village, also called Hamir, though the name really belongs to the Pool. You recognize the name, perhaps? No? Hamir was that Rajput warrior who rebelled against the yoke of the Muslim conquerors and regained a large part of Rajputana for his people, including the important city of Chitor. The goddess Parvati was so pleased with his deed, legend tells us, that she caused the sacred waters to gush from the rock, so that the brave Rajputs might bathe their wounds and be healed."

"Chitor — I've heard of that!" Rosemary

exclaimed. "Don't you remember, Valerie? When Miss Lucia was telling us about the Ruby? The first Roshanara was Ranee of Chitor. When she found that her city could not defend itself any longer, she set fire to her palace and threw herself into the flames."

"Oh, yes, and a slave saved her baby and the Ruby. Of course I remember. Is Patipur the same as Rajputana, Dr. Marcus?"

"Rajputana is a geographical name, my dear, and is made up of a number of native states, of which Patipur is one. Each native state has its own government, but the people are all Rajputs. The most interesting race in India, I always think. They claim to be the purest living specimens of the ancient Aryan line, the white race which settled India twenty or thirty centuries ago. They belong to the Warrior caste, and even to-day make better soldiers than business men. They are wonderful horsemen, expert with weapons, brave to the point of foolhardiness, high-souled, and intensely proud. The old name for their country was Rajasthan, 'Land of Kings', and it was their boast that every man among them was as good as any king."

“Oh, I like them!” Valerie exclaimed. “And they were the ones who chased the Muslims out of their country?”

“Not once but many times, my dear. No conqueror ever succeeded in subduing the Rajputs completely, although all of them tried it. You must realize, my dear girls,” he went on earnestly, that the history of India is not the short, clear record of events that our own country shows. It is a very ancient land of great richness, and for two thousand years it has been fought over by different races. Many of the early invaders were content to raid it, help themselves to treasure of jewels, silks, and spices, and go home again. Others remained to rule for a time, only to give way in their turn to more powerful newcomers, so it has been down the ages.”

“Didn’t Alexander the Great have a try at it?” Rosemary asked. “I have some sort of dim recollection out of Greek history.”

“Yes, indeed, although he was content to load his men with loot and scurry home again. Later Greeks, however, did set up a kingdom in a small portion where they ruled for a short time. The Persians followed them, and also

gained a temporary foothold. Then came great successive waves of Muslims — Tartars and Turks — who fought each other fiercely for control of a land to which neither had any right. Sometimes one side triumphed, sometimes another; sometimes, as happened at Chitor, the natives turned on their oppressors and gained a fleeting victory. Babur's great Mughal empire, which he founded early in the sixteenth century, probably came nearest to making India a united land."

"Oh, now you're getting down to where I know something," Rosemary said, with a smile. "They do teach us English history, anyway. The Mughal emperor Akbar astounded Queen Elizabeth by sending her the most magnificent gifts — I think that's the first place India is mentioned in English history books."

"Probably. It wasn't so long after that the history of India became a part of the history of England."

"The first place I ever saw India mentioned was in American history," Valerie observed. "If Columbus and the rest of them hadn't been looking for a way to India, they wouldn't have come near America. I suppose they were

quite disappointed when they found America in the way."

"Well, they were," Rosemary answered. "We had quite a discussion about that in class last year. When I first began American history, in the early grades, I thought it was queer, the way those old explorers acted. You'd think, when they found a brand-new country, they'd be wild to see what it was like. But did they? No, they did their best to sail around it. It was just a nuisance, a lot of land sticking up there in their way, when they were in a hurry to get to India. Magellan, for instance — he was more than disappointed, he was perfectly furious. He actually lost his life trying to get around our tiresome old country."

"The wealth of the Indies was a powerful lure," Dr. Marcus agreed. "I am afraid, though, that I have led you young ladies rather far afield. You wanted some information about the woman Kumari?"

"If you please, Dr. Marcus." Valerie briskly took up the inquiry. "Dorcas was telling us about her to-day, and she seems to have been such a mysterious person. Dorcas

calls her a 'voodoo woman', whatever that may be. She says that she spent much time making charms — little boats loaded with flowers and things, that she threw into the spring. Was she crazy, or what?"

Dr. Marcus smiled. "Not on that evidence. Kumari was only performing an everyday devotion of her sect. The flowers and — fruit, was it? — were votive offerings to Parvati. Native shrines in India are constantly heaped with them."

"But there wasn't any shrine in the spring house. She just threw them into the water, Dorcas says."

"No doubt she was obliged to adapt her methods to her surroundings. You say that the offerings were placed on little boats? Hm." Dr. Marcus smiled tolerantly. "I wonder if it is not possible that in her ignorance Kumari conceived the waters to be but a continuation of the stream which flows from the Pool of Hamir? Perhaps she imagined her little boats sailing underground until they reached the true shrine in her home village."

"Oh, that sounds reasonable!" Valerie cried eagerly. "I mean, it sounds as if it

might seem reasonable to her. The water in the spring here is like the water at home, she sees it flowing off into the earth, and she knows it comes up out of the earth at Hamir — oh, Dr. Marcus, how clever of you! I do believe that's exactly what she thought."

"It is possible, my dear." Dr. Marcus sighed. "The ignorance and superstition of these people are beyond belief. Is there something else I can tell you, Miss Valerie?"

"Yes, let's see. Is Kumari with the Princess yet, Dr. Marcus? Or would you know?"

"Oh, yes, I am still in touch with Patipur to a limited extent. You must not think that I made only enemies there. The Rajah's personal physician, a highly-educated Rajput gentleman, has always been my friend, although his efforts to intercede for me proved futile. Knowing my interest in the little congregation I had gathered, he writes to me at irregular intervals. Kumari — yes, he did mention her in a letter written some years ago. She is no longer at the court — as I recall it, when she accompanied the Princess home from America she retired at once to her native village. There was something — what

was it? Wait, I have it now. Dr. Khusru wrote me that she had become a female Yogi, a holy woman. You know what that is?"

"I'm afraid we don't."

"It's one of the many curious Indian religious practices. A man, or very rarely a woman, desires to attain great sanctity. He forswears all wordly ties, and gives himself to a life of prayer and meditation, often accompanied by fasting and great physical hardship. Such persons are highly venerated. Kumari, it appears, has chosen such a life. If I recall Dr. Khusru's report correctly, her asceticism takes the form of sitting motionless, day and night, before the Sacred Pool. Food is brought to her by visitors to the temple, and she never stirs from the chosen spot."

"But that's *impossible!*" Valerie exclaimed. "She'd have to get up some time!"

"It seems incredible to you, I know, but I assure you that even stranger things are common among these deluded people. I myself have seen a man stretched upon a bed of iron spikes, from which he has not risen for fifteen years."

"How horrible!" Valerie shuddered.

“Why do you suppose Kumari chose such a life, Dr. Marcus? She was devoted to the Princess; I shouldn’t have thought she’d want to leave her. Is the Princess herself still living, by the way?”

“She is living, although my old friend the Rajah passed away several years ago. She is now Ranee of Patipur, having married her cousin, who succeeded to the throne on her father’s death. In their country, as you may not know, the heir is never the Rajah’s son, but the son of his brother.”

“How queer to think of Roshanara being grown-up and married,” Valerie remarked. “We’ve been picturing her always as a little girl of ten. Why, she must be over thirty now. What is she like, Dr. Marcus? Do you know?”

“A very gracious lady, my friend writes me, and the real ruler of Patipur. Her husband, the Rajah, is an invalid as the result of a fall in the hunting field, and the affairs of state are largely in the Ranee’s hands. Yes, the years have a way of flying by. Her Highness has a little daughter now, of about the age that she herself was when she came to my

sister. Another Roshanara — the name is traditional with the Royal house."

"I don't suppose *she'll* get a chance at an American education," said Rosemary.

"Hardly, I fear. The Rajah Rai Singh, after the disastrous affair of the Ruby, returned in large measure to the ways of his fathers. Lord Bir Bal became prime minister, and all modern innovations were abandoned. Rai Singh finished his reign a just and kindly ruler, in the old manner, but it is saddening to think that he might have been so much more, if only that catastrophe had not happened to embitter him."

"How about Roshanara?" Rosemary asked. "Does she follow the old ways, too?"

"Such is my information. Her young husband leaned heavily upon the counsel of Bir Bal. Perhaps I neglected to mention that Bir Bal is no longer living. When he died, early in the new reign, the young Rajah appointed his nephew, Bhagwan Das, to succeed him as prime minister. Her Highness has continued him in that post since the Rajah's disability, and he has the same narrow outlook that his uncle had."

"It seems a shame," Rosemary began. "Oh, I beg your pardon, Valerie. Were you going to say something?"

"I — I've just thought —" Valerie's tone was so strange, so choked with sudden excitement that Rosemary looked at her in amazement. "No, I wasn't going to say anything," she added, with strained calmness. "Go ahead, Rosemary."

"I was just wondering how Roshanara felt about it all," Rosemary resumed. "Her experiences over here, I mean."

"I could not tell you," Dr. Marcus answered. "She never refers to it in talking with my friend, and he respects the command given to him by the Rajah never to mention the word 'America' to her. Perhaps the affair has completely faded from her mind."

"I don't see how it could do that." Valerie had subdued her excitement now, and spoke casually. "I wish we could talk to her. I'd like to ask her a lot of things."

Dr. Marcus smiled. "I'm afraid we can hardly invade the royal palace of Patipur and cross-question its queen, my dear. No," he sighed, and his blue eyes looked dim and tired,

"we may speculate, and guess, but I am very much afraid that the mystery of the Ruby must remain a mystery to the end."

Rather to Rosemary's surprise, Valerie did not dispute this conclusion. Instead she rose, with a glance at her wrist watch.

"Well, thank you for answering all our questions so patiently, Dr. Marcus. I've learned a lot I never knew before. Are you coming, Rosemary? We promised ourselves to shampoo each other's hair this afternoon, remember? The sun will be too low to dry it if we don't hurry."

CHAPTER XVI

FACTS AND GUESSES

THE grounds of Hollingsworth Hall were heavily shaded, but on the south side there was a patch of open lawn. The grass grew thick and long here, and the two girls sat upon the ground, busy with combs and brushes. Brown hair and gold shimmered in sun and breeze, taking on fresh lustre under vigorous brush strokes.

Valerie shook back her mop of dark curls with a sigh of relief.

“The last snarl, thank heaven.” She shot a glance towards the house, making sure that there was no chance of being overheard. “And now for another snarl. Look here, Rosemary.”

From her pocket she took her translation of the note to Kumari, and laid it on the ground. “I’m beginning to get some light on this at

last. Oh, don't look so startled, darling — I don't mean I've solved the mystery, or anywhere near it. But some of the things Dr. Marcus told us have finally begun to percolate into my brain and — well, I won't say they make sense yet, but I've got some ideas I'm anxious to talk over with you."

"I'm waiting," Rosemary answered eagerly. "You can't begin too soon for me."

"If you don't mind, I'll begin by reading this thing out loud. Listen *hard*!

" 'Greetings, O Kumari. Thus saith our Lord Bir Bal, through his servant Bhagwan Das. The power of the Meddling One waxeth great beyond endurance. Therefore saith our Lord, the Thing-Which-Is-To-Be-Done, let it be done speedily, and in this manner —

" ' — that She-Who-Is-Without-Charms be acclaimed wholly vile, and the might of the Meddling One cast down. Great shall be the triumph of Parvati thereby, and great shall be her reward to those who serve her.' "

"It came over me like a flash this afternoon," Valerie went on rapidly. "When Dr. Marcus was telling us about the effect that the loss of the Ruby had in Patipur — you know, how

the Rajah turned away from modern ideas and went back to the old ways? And Bir Bal and afterward his nephew Bhagwan Das became important people at the court? Something just seemed to click in my brain then. Don't you see it, Rosemary? Parvati *did* triumph! And 'great was the reward' of those who served her, Bir Bal and his nephew."

"But Parvati isn't *real*, Valerie," Rosemary protested. "You don't mean to tell me that you believe in a heathen goddess?"

"Of course not, goose! But what she stands for is real — the old religion, the old ways of living. They did triumph, which was what Bir Bal wanted."

"Oh! Yes, I see that. But — what does it all lead to, Valerie? Do you really know something, or are you just making wild guesses?"

"I don't know myself," Valerie confessed, laughing excitedly. "You'll have to help, Rosemary. But I believe — oh, I do believe that we're beginning to get somewhere at last."

"Well, take it easy," Rosemary advised her. "You get so excited, Valerie; I can't keep up with you."

"Sorry. I'll try to get my thoughts in order, though I'm a little dizzy myself. Let's see if I can sort out facts from guesses. First thing: Bir Bal hated American ways, and was anxious to have the Rajah give them up. That isn't a guess, is it?"

"Of course not. Dr. Marcus told us so himself."

"All right. Second thing: Bhagwan Das and Kumari took their orders from Bir Bal. The letter proves that."

"Right," Rosemary agreed.

"Well, those are two facts." Valerie ticked them off on her fingers. "Here's a third. Lord Bir Bal didn't like Dr. Marcus, and was jealous of his influence with the Rajah. That makes three. And it seems to be about all the positive facts we're sure of, so I'll start on the guesses." She drew a long breath. "Guess number one: Bir Bal didn't approve of sending Roshanara to Miss Lucia. Is that reasonable?"

"I'd say so. It's practically a corollary — you know, like those we have in geometry. You prove one fact, and another follows from it."

“Please don’t drag in geometry! This is hard enough, without any extras. But I think we can take it that Bir Bal didn’t like the American scheme, or anything else that Uncle Marcus suggested. Now here’s another guess that seems just as likely. If the Princess’s visit here ended in disaster, and if that disaster should prove to be the means of disgracing Dr. Marcus and ending his power at court — what did you say, Rosemary?”

“I said —” there was awe in Rosemary’s voice, “‘the might of the Meddling One be cast down.’ Valerie, don’t you see it? Dr. Marcus was the Meddling One, whose ‘power waxeth great beyond endurance’ to Bir Bal! Why, that’s what it meant — it can’t have been anything else! Wait, that isn’t all!” Rosemary seized the scrap of paper. “‘She-Who-Is-Without-Charm’ — Dr. Marcus told us that meant a spinster. Oh, but we’ve been *stupid*, Valerie! It’s Miss Lucia, of course. ‘That she be acclaimed wholly vile’ — she *was*, poor darling. Even furnishings which were in her house were declared polluted. And —”

“Rosemary, you’re *wonderful*!” Valerie interrupted her with an ecstatic hug. “I *told*

you we were getting somewhere, didn't I? And you've moved us on a mile! I had just a suspicion, so wild that I was trying to prop it up with facts and guesses before I dared tell you. But this — those names — why, it *proves* the whole thing! Oh, Rosemary, isn't it wonderful to *know*, at last?"

Rosemary looked dazed. "But to know what? I'm sorry, Valerie, but you're away ahead of me, as usual."

"No, I'm not. You just haven't stopped to think. Add it all up, darling, what we know and what we guess. 'The-Thing-Which-Is-To-Be-Done' — there's nothing else it can mean."

"The Thing — wait, Valerie, I'm getting it now. Bir Bal gave his orders to Bhagwan Das, and he passed them on to Kumari. It was — why, it was all a plot, then! A plot to ruin Dr. Marcus with the Rajah, and give Bir Bal his chance at power. The Ruby — it was never stolen or lost at all. Kumari took it herself, as Bir Bal told her to do. Oh, Valerie, I can't believe it! It seems so cowardly, so cruel!"

"Maybe it didn't seem that way to them,"

Valerie said. "Perhaps they really felt that 'the power of the Meddling One' was a bad thing for their country. But let's not waste our time making up excuses for them. Think what it *means*, Rosemary! It explains everything. The letter — 'The-Thing-Which-Is-To-Be-Done' — that would be stealing the Ruby, of course. Kumari was in the room with the Princess; it would be perfectly simple for her to cut the chain and take the Ruby while she slept. Unless the Princess was in the plot, too?"

"I don't think so." Rosemary shook her head. "That would be taking a foolish risk for nothing. A girl of ten would be too likely to break down when they questioned her. And she had to be questioned, of course, to make the robbery look real."

"Yes, I think you're right. The detectives Bhagwan Das sent — they'd be in the dark, too, and perfectly honest in their search. He was safe in having them, because he knew they wouldn't find out anything. No one knew anything but Kumari, and no amount of questioning would have any effect on *her*."

Rosemary sighed exhaustedly. "Good

work, Valerie! Those detectives could learn a lot from you, if they only knew it."

"I think it's a pretty good job myself," Valerie answered. "Don't give me all the credit, though, you've done just as much. Aren't you excited, darling? I can hardly take it in, even yet. Just think — Miss Lucia to be cleared, after all these years, of that dark cloud of suspicion! And Dr. Marcus! It looked so hopeless at the start, and we've done it, our own two selves. I guess we can be pretty proud, don't you? It all fits together now, like a perfect jigsaw puzzle, with every piece in place. Oh, Rosemary, aren't you *thrilled?*"

"Ye-es." Rosemary spoke slowly, reluctantly. "But every piece isn't in place yet, Valerie. The Ruby is missing still."

"Well, what of it?" Valerie stared. "No wonder we couldn't find it; Kumari took it. But surely that isn't important. What we wanted was to clear Miss Lucia, and our discovery certainly does that."

"Are you sure? Oh, Valerie, I don't want to do this — I just hate it! But honey, stop and think. Our discovery is only guesswork, after all. We can't *prove* that the letter

means what we think it does. Bir Bal is dead. If Bhagwan Das and Kumari chose to deny it, to say that it meant something entirely different — what could we say? To be of any real use to Miss Lucia and Dr. Marcus, it's the Princess who would have to be convinced, isn't it? I thought that was our idea all along — to prove to the Rajah, or his daughter, now that he's dead — that Miss Lucia and Dr. Marcus were innocent. Nothing else would make up for all that they've suffered."

"Of course that was the idea — we don't have to prove their innocence to their friends here who believe in them. It would have to be some proof that the whole world would accept, and that includes the Rajah and Roshanara. But the letter *does* prove it, Rosemary, now that we know what it means."

"If it means what we think it does." Rosemary's gentle voice sounded sorry, but very firm. "Just thinking isn't proof, Valerie."

"Oh, you're right, of course." Valerie slumped disconsolately on the grass. "But good heavens, what are we going to do, then? This is positively sickening! It was bad enough when we didn't know what had happened. But now, to know perfectly well and

not be able to do a thing about it — ! What would be proof, anyhow, if the letter isn't?"

Rosemary shook her head. "I can't think of anything that would be, except the Ruby itself. And that brings us right back where we started."

Valerie groaned. "Of all the hopeless things — ! I wonder where the Ruby *is*, anyway? I suppose Kumari handed it back to the Princess as soon as they were safely on the boat?"

"I hardly think so," Rosemary answered. "After all, the Rajah was an honorable man, Dr. Marcus says. Surely he wouldn't have excused a shabby trick that brought suffering to innocent people, if he knew. And his resentment against all Americans must have been sincere, to last his whole lifetime. No, I don't believe they ever told him."

"Well, then I suppose Kumari turned it over to Bhagwan Das when he came. I wonder how she managed it? You remember the St. Louis detectives and the local police both searched the place before he got here. She must have found a pretty good hiding place for it. I wonder if he has it still?"

"I shouldn't think he'd feel very comfortable with it," Rosemary observed. "It was never supposed to leave the Princess's neck, remember. Seems to me Bhagwan Das would expect some sort of curse to overtake him for keeping it away from its proper place. I don't know how superstitious he is, but I'm surprised that they even got Kumari to take it off."

"Well, we know she did take it off, whether she liked the idea or not." Valerie sighed. "Oh, goodness, Rosemary, I feel exactly like a balloon that some one's stuck a pin into. Just a few minutes ago I was so thrilled, so certain we'd done it at last, and now — why, we haven't accomplished a thing!"

"Oh, yes, we have," Rosemary consoled her. "We've solved the mystery to our own satisfaction, anyway. *We* know what happened. Now if we can just get some proof that will convince other people —"

"And a fine chance we have of doing that!" Valerie said bitterly. "The only real proof would be the Ruby itself, — you're right there, Rosemary. And that's just the same as saying that we'll *never* get any proof."

CHAPTER XVII

VALIANT VALERIE

VALERIE slept restlessly that night, tossing and turning in her great carved bed. Once Rosemary called to her through the open connecting door to know if she felt ill, but drifted off to sleep again at a reassuring answer.

The gray light which comes before the dawn was glimmering outside the windows when Rosemary woke at a cautious sound in her room. Sleepily she opened her eyes, to perceive a dim figure fumbling at her dresser drawer.

“Valerie! What in the world —” she began, but was hushed as the other girl made a swift rush across the room and clamped a hand across her mouth.

“Sh! Don’t wake anybody, whatever you do!” Valerie exclaimed in an urgent whisper. “Will you lend me your electric torch?”

"Of course. It's in the bottom drawer, not the top one. But — good heavens, Valerie, what are you doing up this time of night, and in a *bathing suit*?"

"Oh, my goodness!" Valerie answered pettishly. "Why did you have to wake up? Turn over and go back to sleep again, there's a lamb. It won't be morning for hours yet. Have you seen anything of my big bathrobe?"

"It's in my closet, where you left it," Rosemary answered bewilderedly. "But Valerie, what's it all about? What on earth are you up to?"

"Nothing, nothing at all." The air from the open windows was chill, and Valerie hurried to pull the terry cloth robe over her brief scarlet bathing suit. She found the torch and slipped it into the pocket of the robe; then turned in exasperation when Rosemary set her feet to the floor. "Oh, please, darling, go on back to bed," she begged.

"Not a chance," Rosemary answered calmly. "I don't know where you're going, but I'm with you. Just a second, while I get my bathing suit and robe."

"But I don't want you to come!" Valerie

protested. "Oh, all right, then," she surrendered, as Rosemary showed no sign of heeding her. "You won't need a bathing suit, though. Just put on anything."

"If you need one, I need one." Rosemary's tone was inflexible. "The nearest place I know of to swim, outside of the Sanitarium pool, is ten miles out in the country. They don't allow any one but patients to swim at the Sanitarium, and ten miles is a brisk little walk before breakfast. But lead on, General. Mine not to reason why."

"Oh, Rosemary, I don't know whether to shake you or kiss you!" Valerie exclaimed. "Come on, now, if you have to. And remember, not a sound."

Silent as two shadows the barefoot girls flitted through the corridor and down the dark staircase. Rosemary turned towards the front door, but with a hand on her arm Valerie drew her toward the kitchen. Once there she made straight for the kitchen table drawer.

"The spring house key?" Rosemary whispered.

"Sh! Yes. Don't let the back door slam."

Trees and shrubbery were ghostly in the



"Oh, my goodness — why did you have to wake up?"

dim light. The air was incredibly cool and fresh, the dew-wet grass caressed their feet. Far away over the housetops a few tiny clouds were streaked with rose. Over their heads one brilliant star still gleamed in a sky of clear pale green. A sleepy bird twittered in a tree-top, but all else was breathlessly quiet, awaiting the daily miracle of the sunrise.

It was dark in the spring house, and the sulphur-laden air seemed stuffy and unpleasant after the morning sweetness outside.

"Now what?" Rosemary demanded. "No one can hear us talking here. Will you please explain what this crazy expedition is all about?"

Valerie hesitated. "I didn't mean to tell you until it was all over. And not then, unless something came of it. You're not going to try to stop me, Rosemary — promise you won't! It's not a bit dangerous, and even if it is, I'm willing to take a risk for Miss Lucia's sake. I begged you not to come, but now that you're here, you're not to interfere; you must promise me that."

"I promise nothing until I know what it's all about," Rosemary answered firmly.

"What *is* this crazy thing you're bent on doing, Valerie? Quit stumbling around and explain."

"Come over here." Valerie led the way to the far wall, where the stream widened and disappeared into the rock. "Bend over, Rosemary. Do you see how the bottom of the stream seems to sink where it disappears, as if it were running downhill? See, there's at least a foot of space between the water and the rock where it goes under."

"Yes, I see that. What of it?"

"Well," Valerie's pale face glowed determined in the dusk, "I'm going under there. Now, please! The water isn't deep; there isn't any danger at all. I just want to follow the stream a little way, and see what's down there."

"Valerie Porter, have you taken leave of your senses? I never heard of anything so insane. You're not going to do it."

"I knew it." Valerie sighed. "Oh, *why* couldn't you go on sleeping? Now listen, Rosemary. I told you it wasn't any use trying to stop me. I won't go far, and I'll be as careful as can be. But I'm going, Rosemary; I just *have* to go!"

"But why, Valerie?" Rosemary was impressed by the desperate earnestness in her friend's voice. "I'm sorry, honey; I don't mean to spoil your plans. But it's such a wild, risky thing to do, and what possible good can come of it? What do you expect to find down there?"

"Can't you guess?" Valerie's smile did not extend to her steady eyes. "What have we been trying to find for the last century or two?"

"The Ruby?" Rosemary gasped. "But Valerie, do you really mean it? What makes you think so?"

"Please, Rosemary! I don't want to stand here talking forever. Maybe I'm right, and maybe I'm wrong, but I have to go and see. You're as anxious to find it as I am. You said yourself it would be the proof we have to have, if we're going to clear Miss Lucia. Don't stand around and think up objections. Let me go and find out!"

"All right, honey. I won't try to stop you. Only — we must do everything possible to make sure you're safe. Wait here a minute."

She darted outside, and presently returned with a length of strong clothesline. "Let me

tie this around your waist," she directed. "Then if you do get into deep water, or any place where it's hard to get back, I can pull you. Oh, wait, I'll tie the other end to the doorknob, it looks good and strong. How are you going to carry the torch?"

"In my teeth." Valerie cast off the bathrobe, and knotted her handkerchief about the small torch, which she turned on. "I'll have to crawl, unless the passage gets higher, but I can keep my head up above the water, and the torch with it."

She spoke very matter-of-factly, and as she finished she stepped down into the spring. The warm water swirled about her knees.

Rosemary experienced a sudden qualm. "Oh, Valerie, I wish you wouldn't!" she wailed. "I don't even know whether you can swim."

"Of course I can swim, silly! But not in shallow water like this. Now don't worry, Rosemary. I'll be back before you know it."

"I hope so. You will be careful, won't you? Oh, how will I know if you can't get back, and want me to help you?"

"I'll shake the rope. How's that?"

"Well, be sure you do it. And, anyway,"



"Of course I can swim, silly!"

Rosemary brightened, "you can't go more than twenty feet. The rope won't let you."

"Oh, bother! I can untie it, though."

"You think you can. *I* tied those knots, young woman, and Houdini himself couldn't get out of them."

"Well, maybe twenty feet will be far enough." Valerie resigned herself. "If it isn't, I'll have to come back and have another try later. And you can bet there'll be no helpful friends along that time. Here goes!"

Rosemary handed her the torch, and she gripped the knotted handkerchief firmly in her strong young teeth. She dropped to hands and knees, flashing a smile at her friend. Rosemary bent imploringly over her. "Oh, promise, promise you'll be careful!"

Valerie nodded, and ducked her head under the stone arch. A flash of scarlet and white, and she was gone.

Rosemary crouched on the stone floor, her eyes on the spot where Valerie had disappeared. There was no sound from beyond the arch but the murmuring water. Outside her ears mechanically noted a burst of bird song which told her that the sun had risen. The

light from the small barred windows was growing stronger; the rickety bed and broken lamp stood out with startling distinctness. A sharp creak from the closed door caught her attention, and she noted for the first time that the rope was stretched taut. Valerie had reached its limit of twenty feet.

What could she be doing now? Rosemary had no watch, and no means of judging the passing of time. Seconds seemed minutes; minutes hours.

Rosemary's face paled as she waited; her hands clenched until the nails dug into her palms. Oh, why, *why* had she let Valerie go ahead with this insane project? Terrible tales that she had read of entombed miners rushed into her mind; vivid pictures of men cut off from return by fallen rock. Oh, where *was* Valerie? It must have been hours since she had gone down there into the darkness and the swirl of hidden waters. Brave, reckless little Valerie, where was she now? What treacherous currents, what unknown depths beneath the friendly earth had swallowed her up? Surely she should have returned by now — if she could return.

Mr. Porter's face rose before Rosemary's

eyes. Stern, agonized, accusing. Valerie was all he had, his most precious possession. What would he say? How could she excuse herself to him?

Rosemary could endure her thoughts no longer. Anything was better than this waiting. Valerie had told her not to interfere, but she could not expect that one could bear this suspense and do nothing.

She threw off her own bathrobe and stepped into the spring. In spite of the warmth of the water her teeth were chattering. None of Valerie's gay courage strengthened her heart; she was afraid, terribly afraid, and she knew it. The dark hole under the stone arch was an open doorway to terror. Yet her friend had entered there, and she nerved herself to follow.

She started with an uncontrollable shriek as something fell with a plop into the water beside her. The rope — she had totally forgotten the rope. Oh, what a fool she had been! Why, she needn't go there, into that dark and dreadful place, to find Valerie. The blessed rope of safety would bring her back — was bringing her back, even now.

For the rope, which had been stretched so

tightly that it was high above the water, had slackened now, so much so that it had fallen to the bottom of the pool.

Rosemary took it into her trembling hands and gave it a tremendous pull. The result so startled her that she dropped it as though it had burned her fingers.

“Hey, don’t *do* that!” It was Valerie’s voice, hollow and far-away, but perfectly distinct, and very cross.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE JEWELLED CAVE

ROSEMARY laughed aloud, in a joyous reaction from all her fears. Valerie was alive, unhurt! Rosemary scrambled hurriedly toward the dark arch which a moment ago had seemed so sinister, and eagerly thrust her head beneath it.

“Valerie!” she called into the darkness. “Are you all right? Oh, come on back, *please* — I’ve been nearly dead with worry.”

“Silly!” The familiar little chuckle echoed eerily in the black tunnel. “I was coming after you when you started yanking me along with this crazy rope. Can you hear me? Come on then, I’ll wait here. There’s one bad spot where I am, but the rest of it’s easy. Keep your head down.”

“All right, here I come. Ooh, it’s dark! Did you lose the torch?”

“No, it’s back there. Do hurry, Rosemary. I can’t wait all day.”

"Why not? I did." Rosemary's relief expressed itself in a tendency to giggle violently. Once fully inside the arch, however, she ceased trying to talk, and devoted herself to traversing the passage as speedily as possible.

It was pitch-black, and she could only feel her way. The stone bed of the stream sloped steeply downhill, making it hard to keep her balance on hands and knees. She found it easier to lie flat, hitching herself along with hands and feet in a manner neither dignified nor graceful. She made good progress, however, and presently Valerie's voice came to her, unexpectedly close.

"Stop puffing! You sound like a switch engine. Here you are at last!"

A warm hand grasped Rosemary's shoulder, and she laughed shakily.

"Valerie! I never was so glad to see anybody in my whole life."

"If you can call this seeing!" Valerie answered practically, but she groped for Rosemary's hand and pressed it hard. "Now listen. I'll go first, and you follow right behind me. In a minute we'll come to a queer place — it's a sort of waterfall, a baby Niagara. The floor

slants suddenly, and you have to sit down and slide. You know those water chutes they have in some pools? Well, it's like that. Lots of fun, only you don't want to come on it without warning, as I did. I went over headfirst and jammed my nose on the bottom. No, of course I wasn't hurt. Here it is. Wait, now, till I get down. I'll bring the torch."

Fearfully, under Valerie's direction, Rosemary straightened up, fumbled about and found the edge of the miniature precipice. The darkness was suddenly cut by a dazzling beam of light below her, and she saw Valerie's smiling face looking upward.

"That's right, swing your feet over. Now. Just let go. Don't be afraid, I'll catch you."

Without giving herself time to think, Rosemary slid forward. A breathless rush through space, and she landed on her feet, in Valerie's arms. The two girls were standing in warm water up to their shoulders.

Valerie pointed the torch toward a rocky ledge at the right. "Can you scramble up there? O. K." She gave Rosemary a boost, and swung herself up beside her. "Well, here we are," she observed serenely.

"And am I glad!" Rosemary drew a long breath. "What in the world have you been doing down here all this time, Valerie? I thought I'd go crazy, sitting there for hours and hours, imagining all the horrible things that might have happened to you."

"Hours and hours!" Valerie laughed. "My dear, it must have been all of twenty minutes! Untie your trick knots, will you? The rope will be a help to shin up the waterfall when we go back, but it's a nuisance when I try to move around."

Rosemary complied. She let the freed rope-end slide down into the pool, and peered about her. "What is this place, Valerie?" she asked curiously.

"It seems to be a cave. Wait a minute." Valerie adjusted the flashlight, so that the single sharp ray widened to a glow which spread in every direction. "There. Isn't it pretty?"

"Oh!" Rosemary caught her breath. "Why, it's — it's marvelous!"

Over their heads arched a low rounded roof lined with jagged crystals. They were of vivid yellow, shading into browns and greens, their edges as sharp-cut as diamonds. Where-

ever the lamplight touched them, they glittered blindingly, reminding Rosemary of nothing else so much as the gem-lined cave of the Forty Thieves.

“Are they — jewels?” she asked in awe-struck tones.

Valerie laughed. “Mercy, no. Just rock formation — quartz, I think they call it. Haven’t you ever seen crystal caves before? There’s a wonderful one in Ohio Father and I visited once. It didn’t have these lovely colors, though. I suppose it’s the sulphur from the water that does that.”

“It comes right down over the water, like a cup, doesn’t it?” Rosemary looked around her. The cave was not large, and except for the narrow ledge upon which the girls were perched, the lower part was completely covered by the pool into which they had slid. In a far corner a gurgle of water showed where, as the pool constantly overflowed, the underground stream continued on its way through a narrow crevice into unguessed recesses of the earth. Through other and smaller crevices gusts of chilly wind occasionally stirred, and the air here was perceptibly less warm than the spring house they had left.

"Had enough sight-seeing?" Valerie asked. "There's some serious business before the house, remember?"

"Serious business? What? Oh, you mean hunting for the Ruby. Honestly, all that seems so far away I'd almost forgotten about it."

"Well, I haven't. This is our last chance, and if it fails us — ! Have you got your breath back, darling? I want you to sit here and hold the torch — point it down, like this, to the bottom of the pool. Now keep it there."

"But what are you going to do?" Rosemary asked, as Valerie slid lightly into the water.

"Watch. And keep the light in front of me, please."

Valerie took a deep breath, and swiftly plunged beneath the water. The surface of the pool churned with her movements; presently she reappeared, smiling, shaking back her drenched hair.

"Getting warm!" she exclaimed triumphantly. Over her head she waved a sodden bit of bark, shredded and dank. "Oh, Rosemary, this is too good to be true!"

CHAPTER XIX

WHERE THE LITTLE BOATS GO

“BUT what is it?” Rosemary asked, scanning the dripping fibres with some distaste.

“Don’t you *know*? Rosemary, think. Kumari’s little boats, made of bark. Her offerings to Parvati, which Dorcas told us she put into the water — don’t you remember what Dr. Marcus suggested about that? The poor simple creature thought they would go sailing along under the earth, until they came to light again at Parvati’s shrine in Hamir. They did sail away out of her sight, under the arch, but this is as close as they got to India. They were upset and soaked as they came over the waterfall, and they’re down there at the bottom of the pool. They’ve been there all these years.”

“Valerie — why, how queer! But I don’t see — you don’t think — ”

"I do think," Valerie answered, with a mighty effort at calmness. "I was afraid to hope till I found this, but now — You see, Rosemary, the little boats had to stop somewhere. I didn't know where, when I started down here. For all I knew, they might have found easy sailing for miles, farther than I could hope to follow. I didn't even know but that they *did* go to Hamir, for that matter! Let me tell you it was a load off my mind when I realized that they couldn't very well have gone past this cave. That was why I rushed back for you. Now that there really is a chance, a good chance, of winding up our search in a blaze of glory — well, of course you had to be in on it, Rosemary. You don't think I meant to cheat you out of the end, do you? Just because I didn't want you to come this morning? You see, I thought I'd do a little quiet exploration first, and then come and wake you up if there seemed any hope at all. You *know* I wouldn't be such a pig, after all you've done, as to find the Ruby all by myself?"

"Bless your heart, of course I know that!" Rosemary answered affectionately. "Never

mind about my wounded feelings. Do you actually mean that you think we're going to find the Ruby here? Oh, Valerie, this is exciting! Did Kumari put it on a boat, then? But *why?*"

"Why not?" Valerie was still standing in the water, leaning against the ledge where Rosemary sat. Her face in the torchlight was serious now. "She had to do something with it. She couldn't keep it, both because she might be searched and because, as you suggested yourself, she would be afraid the goddess would be displeased. She couldn't give it back to the Princess without letting the Rajah know it had not been stolen in America."

"But we thought she might have given it to Bhagwan Das or Bir Bal," Rosemary ventured.

"Yes, but what would *they* do with it? Even if they waited and returned it to the Princess after the Rajah's death — well, she'd wear it if she had it, wouldn't she? She was *supposed* to wear it. And Dr. Marcus's friend couldn't help knowing that, could he? No, it's never been returned to its owner, I'm sure

of that. And I don't believe either Bir Bal or Bhagwan Das would want to keep it. They may not have been so superstitious as Kumari, but Bhagwan Das's letter told us that they were followers of Parvati, and I can't think they'd risk offending her by keeping a sacred charm their Princess was supposed to wear."

"I'm sure you're right about that," Rosemary agreed. "It's puzzled me, ever since we agreed that Kumari took the Ruby, to know what she could have done with it. There are perfectly good objections to her having done anything I could possibly imagine."

"Except this!" Valerie said eagerly. "Remember, Rosemary, she believed that her little boats sailed safely to Hamir. Then why not send the Ruby back in the same way? It would be under the protection of the goddess when it reached her shrine — no harm could come to it there, and Kumari could recover it when she returned to India. And give it back to the Princess, I suppose."

"Valerie, I do believe you've hit on it!" Rosemary's tone was solemn. "From what we know of Kumari, it's exactly what she might be expected to do. Oh, and listen!"

Sudden excitement quickened her speech. "Do you remember what Dr. Marcus told us about Kumari? I mean about her having become a holy woman?"

"Why, yes, but — "

"Oh, you don't remember! Don't you know — she sits motionless before the shrine, day and night? Think what that means, Valerie! She's sitting there on purpose, waiting — waiting for the Ruby-boat to come sailing home!"

"And I tried to leave you behind!" There was genuine respect in the look Valerie turned upon her friend. "Well, this is the last word. Everything, every last little point, is cleared up now. From start to finish, we know the story of the Ruby and what happened to it. *Now*," she clenched her teeth in her determination, "Now there's only one thing left — to find the Ruby itself."

She gave Rosemary's hand a hard squeeze, and was gone. In suspense almost unbearable, Rosemary held the light, waiting until the sleek head again appeared out of the water.

Double handfuls of débris were laid in Rosemary's lap, and eagerly the two girls sorted

it out. There were more bits of bark, brittle thorny sticks that might once have been rose stems; something round and hard that was only a peach stone.

Undismayed, Valerie went back and back, working her way now close to the waterfall, where the smooth rock bed was more thickly littered with the wreckage of Kumari's offerings.

Strange things she found; a bit of copper wire twisted into the semblance of a swastika; bright pieces of broken china and colored glass; the decorated top of a candy box. Such treasures as a child might choose for her playhouse the Hindu woman had offered to please her mysterious goddess. The water had long since destroyed other offerings of flowers and fruit, but there could be no doubt that this was indeed the port where Kumari's little boats had come to harbor.

For perhaps the tenth time Rosemary saw Valerie take that long deep breath and disappear under the water. To the watcher on the ledge it seemed that she stayed down a longer time than usual; when she came up she did not, as before, rush to lay her find in Rose-

mary's lap. Instead she waded very slowly toward her, her eyes luminous in her small face, her hands tensely grasping a small dark mass which might have been anything.

"I think I've got it this time," she said, in low, awed tones. "It wasn't in the water at all, but on a kind of little shelf behind the waterfall — the water must have tossed it there as it came over, and it's lain there ever since. It was hardly wet, except from the spray, till I pulled it out through the water. Here, take it."

She put it into Rosemary's hand, using her own two hands to pull herself up on the ledge beside her. "Turn the torch this way," she urged. "Now — let's see."

The thing she had found was a six-inch boat of wood, not bark, perfectly fashioned and well preserved. Flakes of gilt paint clung to the sides; this had been a golden boat once, a royal barge. The high prow bore a roughly carved figurehead which might have represented a woman. A jaunty little mast still firmly upright fluttered a shred of tattered silk.

The body of the boat was of solid wood.

Amidships it was wound round and round with fine brass wire, the strands so close together as to make a solid gleaming girdle.

With a half-fearful glance at Rosemary, Valerie began unwinding this wire. Her sensitive fingers told her that there was something other than wood beneath it; a cavity hollowed out and covered over with the protecting wire. As the first strands unwound she gave an excited exclamation. Underneath was the dull gleam of faded crimson silk.

Impatiently Valerie twitched away the loosened wire and turned the boat upside down on her palm. She scarcely dared look at the thing which lay there. It was something wrapped in crackling silk, tied tight with silken threads which parted as she pulled gently at them — something which, as the protecting silk fell away, leaped into pulsating, crimson life — something in whose depths moved flame and smoke, a smoldering imprisoned fire of deeper, richer hue than the fire of homely kitchen stoves. The mock jewels of the cave-roof lost their beauty now, becoming but tawdry bits of glass before the sombre majesty of this royal gem.

Those crimson flames had gleamed upon the

white neck of the first Roshanara, Ranee of Chitor, when her couriers brought the news that her husband had fallen and her city was doomed. Her faith in their sacred power had comforted her as she transferred the jewel to the infant daughter whose only hope lay in flight. Serenely confident that the Ruby would protect the one of all most dear to her, Roshanara, with high-hearted Rajput courage, turned to the supreme sacrifice. She was of no mind to live, widowed, a helpless vassal at the mercy of the barbarian conqueror. Calmly she arrayed herself in her loveliest garments and all her jewels, summoning the noblest of her ladies to do likewise. Then with her own unfaltering hand she applied the brand which made of her palace a smoking ruin to mock the invaders.

Valerie stirred and sighed, withdrawing her eyes reluctantly from the smoky depths which seemed to draw her as by some age-old spell. There was no need to question or to wonder. In all the world there could not be two gems like this.

“We’ve found it, Rosemary,” she whispered tremulously. “This is the Ranee’s Ruby.”

CHAPTER XX

TWO MONTHS LATER

“ALL ashore that’s going ashore!”

The bugle sounded; the decks of the great liner were a flurry of confused farewells.

“We’ll be right here at the rail, Timmy darling,” Rosemary promised the excited small boy who danced about her. “Find a good place on the dock where you can wave to us until we’re out of sight. Yes, I’ll try to bring you back an elephant, but don’t count on it, honey. I’ll bring *something* nice, anyway. Mums, dearest,” she buried her head for a moment on a familiar shoulder, “You’re sure you can spare me?”

Mrs. Lovell laughed cheerily. “Spare you? My dear, this is going to be the making of our paper. A foreign correspondent — first-hand inside news from a Ranees’ court. Why, there isn’t a big city paper that won’t be envying us. You won’t forget? A regular

news-letter every week, and all the snapshots you can get. Yes, Dr. Marcus, I know we must go. Good-by, sweetheart! I'm so happy for you. And so happy for myself, to be taking Timmy home strong and well, and to have my daughter honored by a queen — really, it's just too much! Good-by, dear, and bless you!"

Mr. Porter handed Valerie a folded paper. "Take care of this, dear, it's your receipt for the Ruby in the purser's safe. Give it to the man from Cook's who will meet you at Liverpool; he'll see that the Ruby is safely aboard the boat for Calcutta, along with you two girls. And give that receipt to Dr. Khusru when he meets you there — I don't want you to have the responsibility for losing it now."

Valerie laughed. "It's funny, all these precautions to take care of the Ruby, and it lay neglected in a spring for twenty years! Yes, Father, I'll remember everything. You'll meet us in New York when we get back? Does it seem queer not to be a patient any longer? You'll remember what Dr. Bowman told you, won't you, and not overwork again? Promise me! Father —" she hesi-

tated a minute, "Have you thought over my plan; you know, the one I suggested last night? Are you going to say yes?"

Mr. Porter smiled, and nodded. "It's yes, if that's what you want, Valerie."

"Oh, good!" She gave him an ecstatic squeeze, and turned to Miss Lucia, who was smilingly awaiting her turn to say good-by. "Surprise, Miss Lucia! You're going to have another new pupil. Will you let me enroll at Hollingsworth Hall when I come back?"

"I shall be very happy, my dear." The little lady beamed. "Yes, Marcus, I know we mustn't stay. You'll tell Roshanara, won't you, girls — you'll make it *very* clear to her that Marcus and I hold no resentment? I shouldn't like her to think —"

"Don't worry, Miss Lucia, I'll see that she doesn't." Valerie bent to give her a hearty hug. "Good-by, Dr. Marcus — no, we won't forget your messages, any of them. I expect the mission will be running full blast by the time you finish your speaking tour and get back to it. Isn't it wonderful that the Ranee's giving you that enormous endowment? Good-by everybody — Good-by!"

Slowly, majestically, the liner moved away from the pier. The two girls leaned over the rail and waved frantically. The group they had left behind waved back; little Timmy held high on Mr. Porter's shoulder, Rosemary's mother on tiptoe, Dr. Marcus supporting Miss Lucia as she blew kisses with both tiny hands. Gradually the faces grew smaller, grew blurred and indistinct, fading into the mass of strange faces about them.

"Well, we're off!" Valerie turned to Rosemary with a sigh and a smile. "Want to go down to our cabin now?"

"I should say not!" Rosemary answered emphatically. "I'm going to stay right here at this rail as long as there's light to see. Do you realize that this is my very first glimpse of the ocean, and ships, and —"

"Begging your pardon, Miss," came the deferential voice of a steward behind them. "I have taken the liberty of arranging your chairs over there. Would that be satisfactory, Miss?"

"Thanks, steward, this is splendid." Valerie led the way to the two deck chairs, and sank into hers with a sigh of content. "This

gives you a better view of the shore, Rosemary. Now you can watch it till it disappears."

"Oh, Valerie, it's all too marvelous!" Rosemary exclaimed. "Honestly, I still think it's a dream, and I'll have to wake up. To be going to India, the guest of a queen — me, little Rosemary Lovell from Kansas! No, it isn't real, it can't be!"

"It's pretty splendid of Roshanara, at that," Valerie observed. "Do you know, when we found the Ruby, and Dr. Marcus cabled the news to his friend, I couldn't help wondering how she'd take it. She had been wrong, or her father had, and I had a notion that royalty wasn't very fond of admitting that. The most I expected was a stiff letter of thanks to us, and a formal apology to Dr. Marcus and Miss Lucia. I didn't dream that she'd be sorry, and ashamed, and anxious to make amends, just like a regular human being."

"I've never seen anything so sweet as the letter she wrote Miss Lucia," Rosemary said. "She'd loved her all the time, or wanted to. But Kumari insisted that Miss Lucia was an enemy who must be held at a distance —

heaven knows what poison she poured into the poor child's ears! Kumari taught her that speech Miss Lucia told us about — you know, 'I am the Princess Royal' and all the rest of it. She didn't more than half know what she was saying, poor little thing. And those orders that she must eat alone — Kumari told Miss Lucia the Princess wanted it, and she told the Princess that the others refused to eat with her. I do think that something ought to be done to Kumari, even now."

"Oh, no, Rosemary! Kumari was only a servant, she had to follow out Bir Bal's orders. Besides, she was really attached to the Princess, and thought what she was doing was for her good. I don't blame Roshanara a bit for refusing to punish Kumari.

"She's making up for it, anyhow, by what she's doing to Bhagwan Das," Valerie went on. "I can think of a lot of people I'd rather be right now than that gentleman."

"Me too! Did you see what Dr. Khusru wrote to Dr. Marcus about it? He is to be publicly degraded. That means that not only will all his possessions be taken from him, but he'll be stripped of his robes of office in the

presence of the whole court, dressed in the sackcloth of a beggar and flogged to the frontier. And it's death if he ever sets foot in Patipur again. The Ranee has been kindness itself to us, but she's certainly stern enough when she wants to be."

"Well, you can't blame her, Rosemary. It was a terrible crime, by Rajput standards. Dr. Marcus was trying to explain it to me. We think about the suffering Bhagwan Das caused here, and feel that maybe since Miss Lucia and Dr. Marcus forgive him, the Ranee should, too. But that isn't the way she looks at it. 'Honor', to a Rajput, is the highest thing in the world — that's the one good thing their religion teaches them. Bir Bal and Bhagwan Das were Rajput nobles, and nothing can excuse their having stooped to a dishonorable act. And what makes it worst of all is that they involved the Rajah in it. Because of what they did the Rajah was guilty of injustice, and he was a man whose very name meant justice in his country. Dr. Marcus says Bhagwan Das is lucky to get off with his life. He certainly deserves all he's getting."

"I suppose so." Rosemary's heart was tender, but her sense of justice was strong, and it was impossible to feel a great deal of sympathy for the treacherous Bhagwan Das. "I hope it's all over with before we arrive, though. I don't want to see it."

"Don't worry, it will be." Valerie smiled. "The Ranee is too furious to wait that long. Besides, our visit isn't going to be spoiled by any unpleasant happenings. It's going to be one grand rejoicing. Feasting, games, processions — you may not be able to bring Timmy back an elephant, darling, but you can certainly bring him a snapshot of his sister riding one."

"My gracious, Valerie! Who told you all that?"

"The Ranee. She told you, too. Don't you remember, in her letter to us she said she was planning to hold a Durbar in our honor? I asked Dr. Marcus, and that's what it means. A sort of carnival, with every one stopping work to celebrate. One long Fourth of July, if you know what I mean."

"Oh, my goodness! What does she want to do that for? We're not that important!"

"But we are, darling," Valerie insisted, half-seriously. "You don't seem to realize how very important we are, in Patipur. We've restored the Ranees Ruby. I don't know anything to compare it with, in this country. If some one had stolen — oh, say the Liberty Bell, or the original Declaration of Independence; you'd expect a big fuss to be made over the people who got it back, wouldn't you? Well, the Ranees Ruby means even more to the people of Patipur than those things do to us."

"But it seems silly, Valerie. After all, it's just a jewel for the queen to wear. What difference can it make to the people of the country whether it's restored or not?"

"Oh, Rosemary, you're hopeless! Can't you understand what tradition means? The Liberty Bell is just a bell that won't even ring, but it *stands* for something, doesn't it? Besides," she went on practically, "as it happens, the return of the Ruby *does* make a difference to the people of Patipur. I don't think there's any doubt, from what the Princess wrote Dr. Marcus, that she means to go ahead with the modernization program her

father abandoned. If the people of Patipur get schools, and electric lights, and decent houses to live in, it'll be because we found the Ruby, and proved that Americans and their ways are to be trusted, after all."

"Valerie, it scares me," Rosemary said solemnly. "To think that something we did — just we two girls, with no one to help us — is going to turn a whole country upside-down. The very thought of that is even more terrifying than — well, than the prospect of making my curtsy at court. And I don't mind admitting that my knees wobble when I think of that."

"Mine don't," calmly replied Valerie. "To save my life I can't think of Roshanara as a queen. All the time we were looking for the Ruby I thought of her as just a scared, spoiled little kid at a strange boarding school, not much different from what I remembered about myself. I think I sympathized with her more than you did, Rosemary, because I knew how it felt. And now, since those lovely letters, I think of her as a dear good friend, terribly ashamed of something that shouldn't have been done and anxious to make up for it. All I

want to do is to reassure her, to tell her that every one understands and nobody blames her."

"Her letters certainly don't sound queenly," Rosemary admitted. "She's so sincere, and so almost humble about everything. But the way she throws money around is royal enough — she simply takes my breath away! Even your father was surprised when he found she'd engaged the Imperial suite on this boat for us. And that lavish letter of credit she sent each of us for traveling expenses — when we don't even have any traveling expenses, because she'd arranged for everything beforehand. It makes me uneasy, to think about taking it all. I suppose she's trying to reward us, but —"

"But you're wrong there, Rosemary. She isn't trying to reward us that way. Money means nothing to her. She lives magnificently herself, and since we're her guests she's simply offering us the sort of living she's accustomed to. To refuse to accept her arrangements would be just as ungracious as — oh, as for us to tell Miss Lucia we don't want lavender buds in our dresser drawers. No, she's

rewarding us, all right, but not with money. That thought never entered her head."

The evening light was failing fast; the dwindling shore now was but a smear of shadow on the horizon. Most of the passengers had gone below; the corner where the two girls sat was quiet and deserted. After the excitement and bustle of the last few weeks it was pleasant to sit here, relaxed and at ease, feeling the throb of the great engines bearing them steadily forward into the open sea.

Rosemary stirred from the pleasant reverie into which she had fallen.

"I wish Miss Lucia could have come," she said wistfully. "The Ranee was so disappointed when she wrote that it would be impossible."

"I'm sorry, too, but of course, with the school opening next week, she felt that she couldn't be spared. I think she'd rather pay her visit later, though, when Dr. Marcus is there. Perhaps she'll take the little Princess back."

"That would be nice. Valerie, you said a while ago that Roshanara is rewarding us, but not with money. You mean trusting the little

Princess to us, to bring back to Miss Lucia, didn't you?"

"Yes. It seems to me that's the highest honor she can pay us. I know I appreciate it more than anything else. And oh, I'm so glad about it all, for Miss Lucia's sake. You know, she always reproached herself that she had failed to understand the Ranee when she was there, that she didn't win her confidence and make her feel at home. I think it's perfectly darling of the Ranee to understand that, and to give her the chance all over again, with her daughter."

"It's lovely of her, isn't it, Valerie? And I guess there's no chance that Miss Lucia will fail with the new Roshanara."

"I know there isn't," Valerie answered grimly. "There'll be no Kumari in the background to make trouble this time. I haven't told you yet, Rosemary," she went on, rather shyly. "But the little Princess is going to have one friend at the school, among all those strangers. Some one she knows, and can trust to help her over the hard places."

"Some one she knows? But Valerie, who?"

"Me."

“Why, Valerie!” Rosemary twisted about to peer into her friend’s face. “Do you mean it? Are you actually going to school there? Why didn’t you tell me?”

“It wasn’t settled until just before we sailed. Father and I talked it over last night, and this morning he said yes.”

“But — but — ” vainly Rosemary tried to conceal her surprise. “Are you doing it just for the little Princess’s sake?”

“No, only partly. I do want to be there with her. I’ve had such wretched times at new schools myself, and I think it would be a real help to her if she could have some one among the older girls to take her troubles to. I could talk to the other girls, you know, explain to them the difference in the way she’s been brought up — oh, I know I could fix things so she’d never be homesick at all, but just have the most wonderful time from the start.”

“Why, that’s lovely, Valerie. But — ” Rosemary hesitated. “It’s only that you always sort of made fun of schools like that. You think they’re old-fashioned — ”

“Well, they are. But I’m not sure that a

year in an old-fashioned atmosphere would be a bad thing for me, Rosemary. You've already admitted that a summer of it has improved me, and it's certainly made me happier. My — my mother was a boarding school girl, you know. I think it would make Father pretty happy if I could get to be more like her," she finished wistfully.

"Well, I think it's wonderful, Valerie!" Rosemary exclaimed sincerely. "I shouldn't be surprised if you find Miss Lucia's course a little more up-to-date than you expect. And anyway, you're so fond of her that you're certain to be happy down there. It makes me a little homesick," she finished frankly. "To think of you at dear old Hollingsworth Hall all winter, while I'm back in my perfectly everyday high school — "

"But you'll come to visit us!" Valerie put in quickly. "I've already planned it, you're coming for the Christmas holidays. You were my first friend, Rosemary; whatever comes, you'll always be my best one. So don't think I'm going to lose you just because we're in different schools. I'm not going to lose you, *ever*, if I can help it."

“Not much chance.” Rosemary spoke gruffly, to conceal her emotion. “Oh, Valerie, I’ve just thought of something funny. Do you remember, ages ago, I warned you that I wasn’t making friends with you to get to go on a boat trip? But we did make friends, and — here we are!”

Valerie laughed, too, and rose from her chair. “Yes, and I remember you said something about being seasick. I don’t want to discourage you, my dear, but I’m certain those waves are getting higher every minute. Maybe we’d better betake ourselves down to the Imperial suite, just in case.”

“Who’s afraid?” Rosemary made an impudent little face at the tumbling waters. “Bring on your ocean! After all we’ve been through, it’ll take more than a few big waves to scare *us*.”

“I agree,” Valerie said gravely. “It’s perfectly plain that those waves don’t know whom they’re threatening. Out of our path, sea! Make way for the guests of Her Highness the Ranee of Patipur!”

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